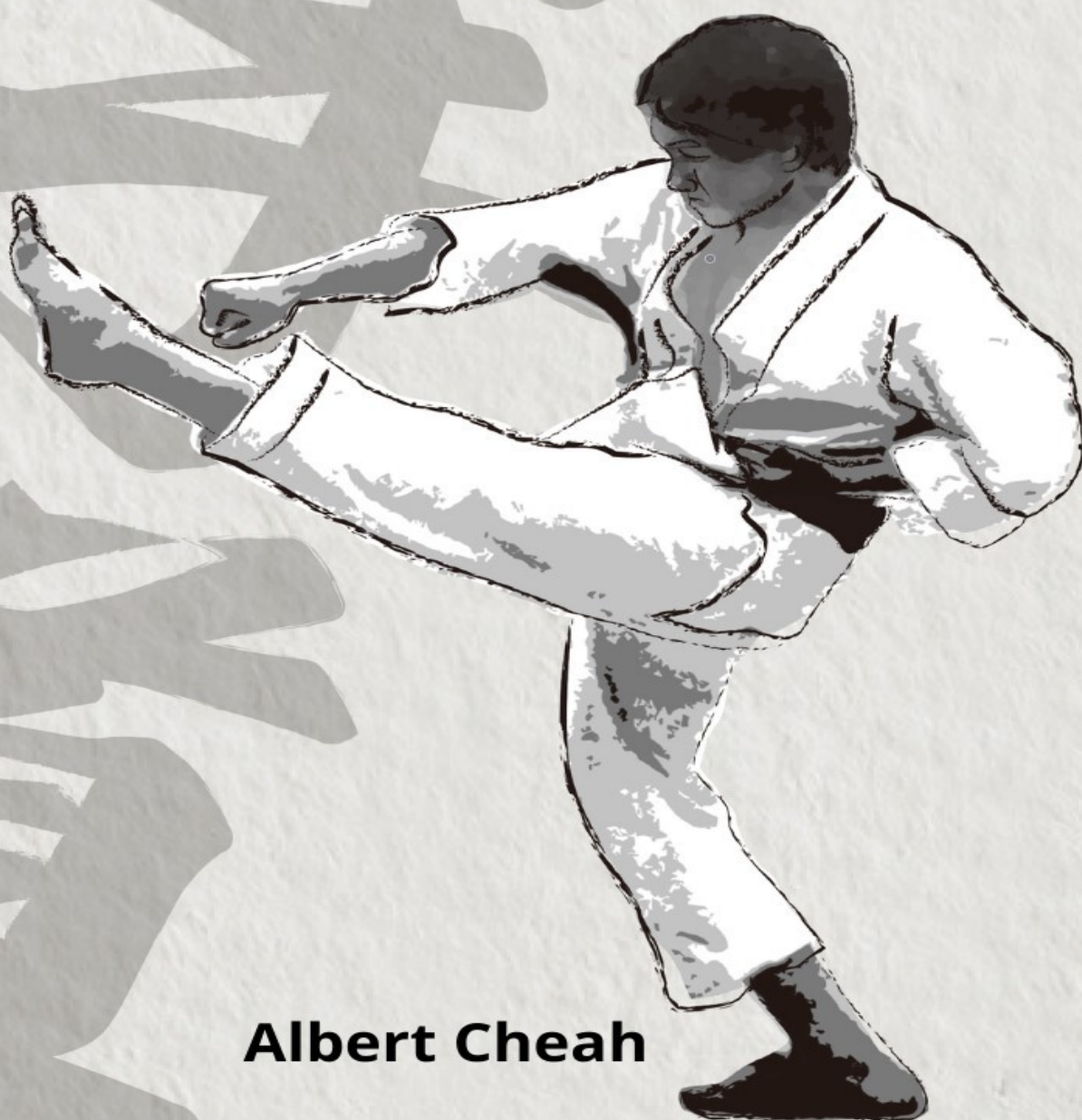




Karate-Do: The Art Beyond Techniques



Albert Cheah



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Author's Note

In keeping with the culture of addressing Asian names by their surname, all the Japanese and Chinese names are written with surname first and given name second. For simplicity of reading the context, the titles of many sensei are not included with the name. This is by no means out of disrespect for the sensei.

Acknowledgement

I wish to express by sincerest thanks and appreciation to the following people for their assistance in making this book possible: Rephael Inbar for his tireless effort in getting the book published; Yukiko Fujie for her outstanding work in designing the front cover: Baily King for reviewing my initial work and providing invaluable insight; Deb Ku for taking the time to edit the content.

Dedication

I wish to dedicate this book to my Sensei, Nishiyama Hidetaka, who dedicated his entire life to the art, and paved the way for many karate-ka to seek the way to understand the art for its true values.

Terminology

- Aikido (合氣道) – way of harmony with ‘ki’
Budo (武道) – translated literally as martial way.
Bunkai(分解) – application of techniques within the kata
Bujutsu (武術) – translated literally as martial art.
Bushido (武士道) – the way of the warrior
Butoku-kai (武徳会) – martial virtue society
Chado (茶道) – art of tea ceremony
Chi (氣) – Chinese pronunciation of ki
Chuan Fa (拳法) – Chinese reference for martial art ‘Fist Law’
Dan (段) – signifies the degrees at the black belt level
Do (道) – the way
Do-gi (道着) – the uniform worn by karate students
Dojo (道場) – the place where martial arts training takes place
Dojo Kun (道場訓) – the principles of the dojo
Embu (演武)- two-person pre-arranged sparring
Hanshi (範士) – master instructor
Honne (本音) – true intention
Iaido (居合道) – art of sword drawing
Ichi Go Ichi E (一期一会) – one moment one gathering
Ikken hisatsu (一撃必殺) – one strike, one kill
Jutsu (術) – reference to art
Kamae (構え) – ready position
Karate-ka (空手家) – a person that practices karate
Kata (型) – prearranged sequences of techniques
Kempo (拳法) – Japanese pronunciation of Chuan Fa
Kendo (剣道) – way of the sword
Ki (氣) – energy (Japanese)
Kiai (気合) – harmonizing one’s energy – usually a shout accompanying a strong technique
Kihon (基本) – basics
Kime (決め) – decide or focus
Kobudo (古武道) – art of weapons
Kohai (後輩) – junior person

Kumite (組手) – sparring
Kyoshi (教士) – advance instructor
Kyu (級) – rank level below black belt
Kyudo (弓道) – way of archery
Matcha (抹茶) – refined powdered green tea
Mokuso (黙想) – meditate
Mushin (無心) – no mind
Ousu (押忍) – acknowledgement expressed by karate students
Renshi (錬士) – accomplished instructor
Sempai (先輩) – senior student
Sensei (先生) – teacher
Shaolin (少林) – tiny forrest. Name of the infamous monastery where kung fu is said to have started
Shiai (試合) – test each other
Shi-nan (指南) – guide
Shodo (書道) – way of calligraphy
Tanden (Tan Dien) (丹田) – source of chi energy, few inches below the navel
Tao (道) – Chinese pronunciation of Do
Tatemaie (建前) – building a front or façade
Te (手) – hand or reference to karate
Ti (手) – Okinawan pronunciation of te
Tai Chi Chuan (太極拳) – Grand Ultimate Fist. Martial art where sequence of movements are performed slowly.
Tode (唐手) – earlier pronunciation of karate meaning China Hand
Todo-me waza (止め技) – finishing technique
Wa (和) – harmony
Wu Shu (武術) – martial art (in Chinese)
Zanshin (残心) – remaining mind

Forward

“Art is long, and time is fleeting.” Longfellow

Any art practiced with humility and perseverance should by its very nature result in personal growth. Such is the art of karate-do practiced so diligently by my longtime friend and teacher, Albert Cheah Sensei. I am truly honored to introduce this thought-provoking guide to the deeper meaning of traditional karate-do.

In this work, Sensei Cheah has filled a niche in the martial arts literature by delving into the true essence of the art of karate-do. This is no superficial glance at this art. Cheah Sensei, aided by his mastery of several Asian languages and his personal soul-searching exploration, has covered a discussion of the physical aspects of martial training, its vocabulary and historical roots. But more importantly for our times, he has captured the essence of the truly spiritual nature of our art. As Cheah Sensei has deeply explored in this work, through perseverance and humility, we can approach “the perfection of character” desired by our Founder.

I met Cheah Sensei perhaps 30 plus years ago, and over the years have been privileged to know the depth of his knowledge, his phenomenal technical ability, and his humble teaching style and kindness. He has taught at my dojo many times and his engaging methods and fantastic technical skills have benefited us all.

Cheah Sensei, a lifetime student of Nishiyama Sensei, is a supremely gifted athlete, an international instructor and a man possessed of the deepest character. Though Cheah Sensei is ten years my junior, much of what I know of karate has been given to me by this fine Sensei and close personal friend. There is much wisdom in what he has put to paper. A single read will not suffice.

So, drink deeply of the true path of karate-do and as you do, you may come to understand that this path is deeply personal and indeed spiritual. To trudge this path requires shedding the ego of our youth and replacing it with humility and “the beginners mind.” Cheah Sensei’s work herein, can help lead us all on this journey.

Tim Hanlon, M.D.

Chief Instructor, Bend Karate, Oregon

I ntroduction

From the moment a prospective student walks into a karate (or commonly referred to as karate-do (空手道) by traditionalist) dojo (道場) , he or she will witness the crisp snapping sound coming from the *do-gi* (道着) as students execute powerful techniques with their arms and legs. The instructor paces the floor and commands the class to have more “Budo (武道) spirit” and be fearless like a samurai warrior. All the students respond by grunting out loud, “*Ousu* (押忍) ” and proceed to spar with their partners as if the other person had committed a nefarious crime against them. When the class ends, all the students line up then kneel in an orderly manner, reminiscent of a military school. As sweat pours down profusely drenching their *do-gi* (道着) , the students are commanded to remain calm and meditate. The loud cries of “*kiai* (気合) ” and the violent rage that was displayed earlier had now turned into a moment of quiet solitude. For many of the students, the feeling after the end of class is one of exuberance, especially after having totally exhausted their energy on the dojo floor. This is the dichotomy of learning traditional karate that is supposed to assuage the practitioner from stress by learning how to fight.

For the inquisitive layman, it may pique their curiosity as to what would compel people to train in such a seemingly violent manner and feel sanguine afterwards. But in general, the majority of the public these days would think, why would anyone, subject themselves to such an arduous training, for the sake of exercise or self-defense? Certainly, there are easier ways to exercise and enjoy doing it, like yoga, biking, dancing, or any other types of recreational activity with no contact. And if you wanted to defend yourself, it would be much simpler to learn how to shoot a gun instead of having to train for years.

It is indeed difficult for anyone who has not experienced karate to understand the reasons why anyone would subject themselves to such grueling sessions. The misconceptions about karate has led neophytes to stray from the art, believing it to be either too violent or potentially harmful to their own bodies. The depth of understanding is lacking not only amongst the general public, but also with the modern practitioners as to the full benefits of karate training. The intrinsic values of

practicing karate, i.e. self-discipline, self-confidence, self-defense, etc. is known even to those who have never trained. But the values instilled in the practitioner, after years of training goes beyond the obvious and resides within the depths of truly understanding the art.

Modern karate, which has become competition centric, has only displayed a shallow view of karate and fails in educating the students about the benefit of training for life. The impending introduction of karate into the Olympics in Japan by 2020, conceivable could further dilute the traditional values of the art. As karate-ka become more consumed with training for competition, the original ideals of the movements are no longer understood and randomly discarded. More disconcerting than the technical issues is the lack of development in the moral values of the practitioner. The significance of educating the karate-ka about the budo (武道) aspect of the art is vital towards benefiting the practitioner beyond the finite competition time line.

Countless number of books have been written on the subject of karate, ranging in topics from technical, philosophical, spiritual, historical, to a myriad of related subject matters. Many karate experts have even written entertaining accounts of their training with valuable insights into what it takes to become a master in this art. All these books certainly have merit with no doubt a positive spin on karate as an art that benefits the practitioner. However, the underlying philosophy, culture and tradition associated with the art, which can be applied in one's daily life is lacking in modern training. The dissonance being displayed by various karate organizations reaffirms the lack of understanding and application of the philosophical aspect of the art. Emphasis is placed more on technical proficiency rather than actual human character development.

As martial artists, techniques and proper responses are refined on a regular basis, in preparation for that unexpected attack from unknown assailants. Different self-defense application scenarios and sparring drills are repeated numerous times in class. Chances are the majority of the practitioners will never have to use these self-defense skills against anyone in their lifetime. And if by some unfortunate circumstance, should physical response become the last course of action, such encounters are rare in comparison to the multitude of confrontational fights we face on a regular basis. Think about the number of times you

had to resort to physically fighting someone at work, at school, at home, or even out in public. Unless you are in a war zone, hopefully the encounters are exceedingly rare. Now think about the number of times you had to confront someone to resolve an issue, an argument, or verbal dispute between neighbors, co-workers, strangers, or even friends. While learning how to defend against attackers is essential to the study of karate, if the focus is solely on perfecting the physical techniques, we have missed the true essence of the art. Many karate students fall victim to the one-dimensional training and either ignore or misunderstand the significance of learning karate to improve the individual as a whole and gain essential knowledge.

The type of knowledge karate-ka obtains is not limited to only physical skills but also intellectual. “Knowledge is Power,” is often quoted to imply the obtainment of information gives one power. While the accumulation of knowledge can lead to possession of power, it can be argued that without having the ability to apply the knowledge there is no power. Albert Einstein conceived the theory of $E=mc^2$, but it was not until Robert Oppenheimer and his team developed a device based on this mathematical equation that this knowledge about energy became the most powerful weapon known to mankind. Ironically, the power of the atomic bomb brought about both mass destruction and peace.

Karate students also possess power in their techniques, which can be used to harm others or bring about a peaceful resolution without use of violence. The technical knowledge that karate-ka possesses is the ability to effectively disable, maim, or even kill someone. Karate-ka’s technical knowledge and skill could be perceived as being used for derisive purpose, rather than for self-protection, if there is no balance in understanding of the philosophical meanings behind the art. Thus, it is important to be guided by a sensei who understands technical prowess and the moral implications of the use of karate for the betterment of oneself and society. Since the sensei is the ultimate authority in the karate dojo, his or her directions are followed implicitly by the students. If such knowledge is not applied properly, the power the students and instructors possess can have a negative image on the art. Hence, the importance of perfecting the character of its participants toward something that is constructive and beneficial to not only the

students and instructors, but also anyone that the karate-ka interacts with.

One of the most virtuous traits to be gained by practicing karate is promoted as – perfecting one’s character. In fact one of the famous precepts in karate is a saying from Funakoshi Gichin (considered by many to be the Founder of modern Karate-do), “The ultimate aim of karate-do (空手道) lies not in victory or defeat, but in the perfection of character in its participants.” But how and whether this virtuous trait can be achieved is not always clear to even senior students in the art. The expectation is that after years of austere training, the karate-ka’s character suddenly improves, as if by osmosis, which does not always occur. With emphasis on repetition and strong spirit, it is easy for students to gravitate towards seeking perfection of technique, and not necessarily perfection of character. As a result, some karate-ka, even senior level, do not always display the desired character that the forefathers of karate-do (空手道) initially intended.

Character building is not unique only to karate or martial arts. Youth at various school levels are encouraged to participate in sports activities, such as football, basketball, soccer, track and field, etc., specifically for those reasons, to better themselves and improve their character. Although not always openly publicized, sports activities also involve training the body and mind. So, what then differentiates karate’s value as an art from mainstream sports activities? Is the art so esoteric that only the few seasoned practitioners can appreciate the beauty of the art beyond the obvious? If karate is practiced strictly for the sake of competition, then there is no difference between karate and any other sports.

Sports in general has finality for the participant with the maximum physical potential being reached at a much earlier stage in life. What sets karate apart from sports is the long-term pursuit of maximizing one’s potential; mentally, physically, and spiritually. But more importantly it is about the application of the art in life.

The perception of karate-do should not be limited only to the observation of repetitive training and the display of karate-ka attempting to throw punches and kicks against each other. Understanding the correlation between what transpires in the dojo to developing an individual of good character is essential for preserving

the purity of karate as an art to be practiced as a way of life. Of course, one cannot possibly gain true insight into the art by simply reading books, but if it serves the purpose of initiating a better understanding, it would have succeeded in leading the prospective and existing students towards the right path of discovery. Ultimately true appreciation and understanding comes from the act of doing, not just by seeing or hearing, as noted by this sage Chinese proverb.

To hear is to forget
To see is to remember
To do is to understand

It is my hope that after reading this book, the public will have a better appreciation for the art of karate-do from a broader perspective, rather than just about self-defense and competition. And for the veteran students of the art to realize that karate-do is not a one-dimensional art focusing strictly on refining techniques, but the importance of wanting to shape one's character through training that will enrich their lives. For those teaching the art, it is essential that the proper message is conveyed in order to proliferate good students for the betterment of society. But in order to do so requires teaching students about the true value of karate-do beyond techniques, which consists of the philosophy, culture, and tradition associated with the art, and how they can be applied in one's daily life.

Differentiating Between Karate and Karate-do

Is there a difference between karate and karate-do? From a traditional standpoint, karate and karate-do refer to the same art. The naming convention is commonly used interchangeably with karate being the abbreviated name for karate-do. But at its inception on the island of Okinawa, the art was simply called karate or simply ‘te’ (手) without any suffix, such as *jutsu* (術) or *do* (道) . In order to understand the reason behind the adding of the suffix, *jutsu* (術) or *do* (道) a brief history of karate is warranted at this point.

Historical account traces the origin of karate to the Ryukyu islands, with most notable reference to Okinawa, since it is the largest of the small island chains. Karate in Okinawa was heavily influenced by Chinese martial art called, Chuan-fa (拳法) , pronounced in Japanese as Kempo (拳法) . Other indication of influences from Chinese martial arts is the use of the name Shaolin(少林) or Shorin (in Japanese), which is said to be the birthplace of many of the Chinese kung fu (功夫) styles. Shorin has become part of the naming of Okinawan style of karate, Shorin-ryu, Shorin-ji-ryu, as well as the use of Kempo (拳法) karate to associate the lineage to Chinese techniques and principles. Even the original name for the art was called, China-hand, or “To-de”(唐手) . Alternative pronunciation for “To” (China) being Kara(唐) would eventually become the recognized naming of the art as Kara-te(唐手) .

Okinawan karate was further influenced by Japanese martial art system called, *bujutsu* (武術) , literal translation meaning martial art. Being a sovereign state of Japan, Okinawan karate adopted many of the *bujutsu* (武術) principles, which were primarily based on the samurai warrior class. *Jutsu* (術) , meaning art, became the descriptive for many of the Japanese martial system as an art to develop one’s skill. The suffix, *jutsu* (術) was associated with the Japanese martial arts such as ju-jutsu, aiki-jutsu, and ken-jutsu. In turn, Okinawa karate also adopted the use of the suffix *jutsu* (術) , emphasizing the technical skills of the participant. The integration of Japanese *bujutsu* (武術) ,

Chinese Chuan fa (拳法) , and the indigenous fighting methods of Okinawa formed the completion of karate-jutsu.

As the art evolved from a pure fighting art to one of developing the “way” for self-realization and self-improvement, *bujutsu* (武術) transitioned to *budo* (武道) . This is not to say *bujutsu* (武術) was abandoned in favor of *budo* (武道) . On the contrary – it enhanced the way the art is being studied with the inclusion of Buddhism ideals and Zen philosophy. In effect, “do ” or “the way” became a means toward bettering oneself, not only in terms of technical skills in the art, but also through the understanding of the philosophy and culture.

The adaptation of “do ” (道) by many of the Japanese martial arts changed the suffix from *jutsu* (術) to *do* (道) ; ju-jutsu(柔術) became judo (柔道) , ken-jutsu to kendo(剣道) , aiki-jutsu(合氣術) to aikido (合氣道) etc. Karate also followed suit and became karate-do. Along the way, the “Kara” kanji for China was changed to “kara ” (空) for empty, reflecting the deeper aspiration for the art and as a part of “do .” The “do ” suffix became an inseparable part of majority of the Japanese martial arts in name, except for karate. While it would be inconceivable to call judo as simply ju, or aikido (合氣道) as aiki, or kendo (剣道) as ken, karate-do, however, can just be referred to as karate. Karate or karate-do was understood to be one and the same with emphasis on karate-do when referring to part of *budo*(武道) .

Historical note: Dai Nippon Butokukai(大日本武徳会) , translation, “Greater Japan Martial Virtue Society,” established in 1895 to promote and standardize martial arts throughout Japan, officially recognized karate as karate-do in 1933. Okinawa did not officially recognize it until 1936.

Since its introduction outside of Japan, the popularity of karate has given way to a multitude of systems using the name with emphasis on different ideals for training. Under the general classification of karate, some systems emphasize traditional and/or non-traditional approaches to training while others place emphasis on sports, reality fighting, or some eclectic fighting forms. There is nothing wrong with the various interpretation or ideals that have blossomed through karate’s popularity since they are simply an embellishment of the art through self-

expression. But in broadening the various interpretation, karate in name as well as an art, is no longer reflective of the homogeneous martial art that stems from a common root. This indigenous art of Okinawa is today loosely associated with most martial arts executing kicks and punches with the practitioners wearing a do-gi (道着) or similar type of uniform. To the uninformed even some non-Japanese or non-Okinawa systems are referred to as karate, such as Tae Kwon Do, Hwa Rang Do, Chinese Kempo (拳法), and some systems of kung fu(功夫). Karate, in name is no longer simply an abbreviation for karate-do, but an amalgamation of various interpretation of the art.

With so many versions of kicking and punching arts using the name karate, it becomes necessary to differentiate between karate, which encompasses a wide gamut of ideals for training, versus karate-do that strives to follow the principles of “do .” While contemporary interpretation of karate may veer towards predominately physical prowess, the “do ” aspect is about the continual studying of the art as a way of life. The point of emphasis is that karate-do is not practiced simply as a short-term course in college, or as a means of learning some quick and easy self-defense techniques. The philosophical aspects of karate-do offer the intangibles that become invaluable to the cultivation of the karate-ka. The practice of karate-do is not relegated to only competition or fighting, but the continual improvement of the individual and exploration of the art. Learning how to fight can be accomplished in a relatively short period of time. Learning how to improve one’s character can take a lifetime. This is what defines the “do ” in karate-do.

While it is understood by traditionalist that karate-do and karate refer to the same art, the preference throughout this book is to use karate-do to differentiate between the art whose lineage is integrated between, China, Okinawa, and Japan, versus other modernized interpretation of the art. Karate without the “do ” suffix will be used to refer to the general multi-faceted view of the art.

Beauty of the Art

“Any person who attains complete mastery of any art reveals his presence of mind in every action.” Old Chinese adage

Chado (茶道), meaning “way of tea,” is a classical Japanese art involving the ceremonial preparation and presentation of powder tea, known as matcha (抹茶). During the feudal period in Japan, a Chado (茶道) master, while walking down a crowded street, inadvertently bumped into a proud samurai and touched his sword. In the samurai culture, a man’s honor is said to reside in his sword. The Chado (茶道) master realizing he had touched the samurai’s sword apologizes to him profusely. But as his honor was at stake in front of so many people, the samurai would not hear of the man’s act of contrition. The samurai demanded a duel to the death for causing such an impudent act. The Chado (茶道) master expressed his unwillingness to fight, since he only practiced the art of tea ceremony, and had no knowledge of the sword nor possessed one. “Then I give you one week from today to learn and fight me to the death at this location” responded the samurai, and continued with an ultimatum, “If you do not appear on that day, I will hunt you down and disgrace your family name in front of all these people.”

The apprehensive Chado (茶道) master had no idea what to do, other than to enlist the suggestions of his old friend, a kendo (剣道) instructor. The Chado (茶道) master explained to his friend what had transpired and asked for his assistance in teaching him how to use a sword.

“There is no way anyone can teach you to master a sword in one week, let alone go up against a well-trained samurai” the Kendo (剣道) instructor replied. Feeling helpless, the Chado (茶道) master said, “Then, what should I do?”

The Kendo (剣道) instructor suggested to his friend, “There’s only one thing you can do, ask for forgiveness again and demonstrate what you do best.”

When the fateful day arrived, the samurai was surprised to see that the man who had brought him dishonor did not come with a sword. “Where is your sword!” demanded the samurai.

The Chado (茶道) master apologized and responded, “I cannot fight you, but if this is to be my last day on earth, would you please permit me to perform one last tea ceremony?”

“Very well,” replied the samurai, “But at the end of your ceremony, I will be prepared to cut off your head.”

The Chado (茶道) master proceeded to sit on the ground in preparation for his final tea ceremony. As he began to boil water and carefully pour the powder tea into the pot, the samurai looked with bewilderment. Here was a man that was about to meet certain death, yet he remains calm and prepares tea. Throughout the ritual, the Chado (茶道) master never wavered in making his final ceremony as perfect as possible. When the final act was completed, the samurai knelt before the Chado (茶道) master and said, “I have seen many men who are about to die, most are fearful at the thought of death, and some cowardly beg for mercy. But you, facing certain death, calmly prepares tea without losing focus.”

The samurai then bowed to the tea master and said, “Please forgive me, I had almost taken the life of a true master of his art. Please allow me to become your student so that I may learn how to face death so calmly.”

“Any person who attains complete mastery of any art reveals his presence of mind in every action.” Old Chinese adage

The tea master, even in the face of death, was able to absorb himself to demonstrate his art without faltering. Even though Chado (茶道) is not a martial art, the samurai recognized the extraordinary mental focus the tea master possessed, and the manner in which he conducted himself in performing the ceremony – with elegance and preciseness. He was in a “Zen state” as it were, where he was completely absorbed into his art. The tea master had revealed mastery of his art in his every action.

The beauty of any art form is appreciating the skill involved in making the product. The tea master’s every movement embellishes the art of preparing and making tea. It is in the creation of a thought-provoking work that epitomizes Michelangelo’s Sistine chapel, in the same way one can appreciate the beauty of the ballet dancers in Swan Lake, as they express the art in athletic form. Even though karate-do is considered an art, not many can visualize the beauty of its work in the same manner as the Sistine Chapel, Swan Lake, or tea ceremony.

Karate-do is often viewed by the casual observer as an art that trains the body and mind primarily for self-defense. It is difficult to imagine the beauty of karate-do as an art form when it involves punching, kicking, and yelling at another individual. Visual realization of something beautiful is obvious but may not necessarily contain any substance. Part of what defines beauty is appreciating what the art or person has to offer. A person with a wonderful personality is said to be “a beautiful person on the inside” regardless of how they may look externally. The reverse can also apply where someone is beautiful on the outside but has a shallow personality on the inside. At first glance a cactus may not appear beautiful in the sense that the thorns are threatening. However, the flower it produces reveals an image of beauty. But to a person dying of thirst in the desert, the cactus is appreciated for what is inside - water. Just as the samurai can see the beauty of the tea ceremony presented before him, he felt greater appreciation for the tea master’s ability to control himself mentally and emotionally in the face of death. The depth with which an artist can express their art magnifies its beauty.

While entrenched in a particular subject, the long-term benefits are not readily apparent initially. Karate-do students are subjected to regiments that are superficially obvious, but most may not have any idea of its long-term value. Just as many high school students who are not mathematically inclined are flummoxed as to why they need to study algebra. First off, they have no interest in the subject, and secondly, no one ever uses it in real life, except mathematicians occasionally. On the surface, algebra is just another math class that students need to pass in order to proceed to the next grade. What is not apparent is that by going through the process of learning how to solve mathematical equations, the student’s logical portion of the brain is being stimulated. Regardless of whether the student will ever apply algebra in their lifetime, they will have possessed a more logical approach to solving problems in the future. Geometry, likewise, is practical for learning shapes and angles, but why learn proofs? The process in geometry by which proofs are to be rationalized, using known theorems and hypothesis, is the basis for lawyers to logically outline proving or disproving cases. The physical rewards of karate-do

training are readily apparent, but deeper appreciation for the art is yet to be understood.

Many proponents of karate-do sometimes only see the technical value of the art. Beneath the fierce combat element of karate-do is the influence of Zen, Confucian doctrines, Lao Tzu's Tao De Ching, and Sun Tzu's Art of War, just to name a few. None of these philosophical influences are apparent when practicing karate-do, in somewhat the same way as the student learning algebra. Steeped into the training is the influences of these concepts that are taken for granted, especially the ones not related directly to fighting. The family values and social behavior from Confucian doctrines are embedded into Japanese and most Asian cultures, as well as into the martial arts. The gesture of bowing is a form of greeting as well as a sign of respect performed all the time in the dojo as well as outside the dojo. The hierarchical structure of sempai and kohai, meaning senior and junior, respectively, is one that is recognized in the social norm, and entrusted upon the karate-do students. Such behaviors then influence the students to become courteous towards others in society and show respect towards their elders. These character traits are ingrained into the karate-do student over the course of time.

Even the martial aspects of training take on the characteristic of the concepts set forth by Lao Tzu's, Tao De Ching, and Sun Tzu's, Art of War, not just for the strategy in combat, but to influence the practitioner for life itself. These principles validate the fact that a well-trained karate-ka fights with calmness rather than out of anger since anger manifest itself in the destruction of the individual. Hence the importance of understanding the biggest enemy to overcome is oneself. And when confronted with a bigger and stronger opponent, the best way to overcome such a challenge is by using softness instead of brute force. These concepts are sewn into the training, especially when engaging in kumite(組手). After years of training, these principles become part of the practitioner in the way they handle themselves in life. Learning to remain calm in the heat of confrontation and rationalize an amicable solution.

The samurai sword is often displayed in homes and dojo symbolizing both its beauty and a weapon to be reckoned with. The beauty of the sword's pristine metal definition and strength is the by-

product of repeatedly pounding, heating, and folding what was once raw steel into a beautiful sharp implement. The process of producing a samurai sword is similar in a way to training an unskilled individual into a karate-ka. The arduous training of repeatedly executing the same movements over and over with unrelenting drive from the sensei is to pound the individual's body, mind, and spirit into a formidable human being. The beauty of the karate-ka is his or her ability to execute sharp techniques and possess wisdom to become a person of good character. Hence what is seen as senseless punching, kicking, and yelling at another individual is the process of forging the human body into something of beauty in the end. But unlike the samurai sword, the beauty that is displayed in the karate-ka does not rest on a mantle simply after achieving black belt level, but continues to grow more refined as the training advances.

Indeed, one of the beauties of karate-do training that distinguishes itself from other physical exercises or sports is that it transcends age. The aggressiveness of some karate-do movements is perceived as destructive power. But the physical strength that the karate-ka portrays is only a conduit for building something more long lasting. If trained properly under the guidance of an instructor with the proper understanding of karate-do principles, a practitioner can continue to train into an advanced age. Okinawan masters of the past who did not have the luxury of studying human physiology or kinesiology were able to train into the advanced ages of 70s and 80s. This trend continues with modern day karate-ka incorporating the latest scientific studies on proper exercise methodology to minimize injuries to the joints. Along with the longevity of training is the depth with which the masters have developed in the art. Even with diminishing natural attributes such as, speed and agility as a result of aging, the advanced masters can still outperform the more vibrant younger karate-ka.

Art has no limitation nor is it limited only to those who are gifted to express its beauty. Anyone can pick up a paint brush and draw, in the same manner, karate-do can be practiced by anyone regardless of age or sex, even those in wheelchair, or any other forms of disabilities. Karate-do does not define the person, instead the person defines the art. The purpose for training is also up to the individual ranging from fitness, weight loss, self-defense, competition, cultural interest, spiritual

enlightenment, among others. To appreciate the overall beauty of karate-do training, one must explore all aspects of the art.

Exploration of the art of karate-do also has no limits. However, some karate-ka would confine themselves to studying only one view point of karate-do, believing it to be the only truth. Such is the narrow mindedness of believing only one style to be the best. There are many different paths that could conceivably lead to the truth. The following story illustrates the importance of learning the art from all different viewpoints in order to realize a larger picture.

Three blind men who had no idea what an elephant was, were placed in three different parts of the elephant and asked to feel it and later describe the creature. One blind man was placed in front of the elephant, the second man at the tail, and the third at the middle. When the first blind man was asked to describe the creature, he said, “An elephant is a creature with this long nose like a snake with two big horns on the side.”

Upon hearing the first blind man’s description, the second blind man disputed it saying,

“No, no, no, an elephant is a creature that smells and has a tiny whisker attached to a tail.”

The third blind man feeling confident that he had felt the mammal correctly said, “You are both wrong. An elephant is this massive wall like creature with rough skin and hair.”

The moral of the story is that from each of the three blind men’s perspective, they were all correct. However, each of the blind man was only seeing a small piece of an entirely larger entity. Analogist to the elephant, karate-do as an art must be studied and understood from various perspective. The exploration of the art should not be confined only to one’s style, but open minded to understand the perspective from other styles or form.

“There are no styles of karate-do, just varying interpretation of its principles.” Mabuni Kenwa, Founder of Shito-Ryu

By digging deep into a subject, the depth of knowledge becomes greater, and one will uncover something of beauty and treasure it for life. This in essence is the beauty of karate-do as an art. The mental focus, the enduring spirit, the will to excel, to improve with age, and

train forever, brings out the beautiful qualities of an art that allows the artist to eventually express it in their own way.

“ It does not take sharp eyes to see the sun or the moon, nor does it take sharp ears to hear the thunder clap. Wisdom is not obvious. You must see the subtle and notice the hidden to be virtuous .” Sun Tzu

Seeking Perfection

“The ultimate aim of karate lies not in victory or defeat, but in the perfection of the character of its participants.” Funakoshi Gichin

An unknown Romanian female gymnast, at the age of 14, steps up to the uneven bar at the 1976 Olympics, in Montreal, Canada. She performs her routine with precision and grace. As she completes her routine, she sticks the landing after a full flip and a half twist in midair. The resounding applause from the audience was soon followed by the highest point possible from the judges - perfect 10. The score boards actually read 1.0 since the manufacturers of the scoring equipment used in Montreal Olympics did not imagine anyone scoring a perfect 10. Nevertheless, an unknown Romanian girl named, Nadia Comaneci, had achieved perfection in the world of gymnastics.

Nadia would go on to receive “perfect 10” scores six more times for different events during the Montreal Olympics. Nadia had set an unprecedented standard for perfection. But when multiple gymnasts began to record perfect 10s in future competitions, the idea of perfection began to lose its luster in the world of gymnastics. Soon after, the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG) revised their scoring method to no longer limit scoring to 10 by better defining difficulty and execution scores, thus inspiring future gymnastics to excel beyond previously defined, “perfect 10.”

Humans are not perfect, and neither is the world that we live in. It is through this imperfection that gives human beings the impetus to improve and strive towards bigger goals. If we have reached the pinnacle of our craft, it is sometimes easy for human beings to become content, then complacency sets in. Even in the world of sports, perfection is never defined as an end, as the International Gymnastics Federation sets new standards for future gymnasts to aspire to, beyond Nadia’s perfect 10. Even marathon runners’ records continue to get shattered with each competition, as the seemingly impossible time to beat keeps getting shorter.

In battle, martial artists recognize that pitfalls such as complacency and languidness cannot exist where one split second defines life or death. Martial artist continues to strive towards perfecting his skills without seeking an end. In this way, the ultimate goal is not about

reaching perfection, but establishing the indomitable spirit in the artist as a result of the path traveled. The body is merely an instrument to perfect technical skills, but the underlying purpose of the austere training in karate-do and other martial arts is to maximize one's potential. In the dojo, when the energy level of the students' waver, motivation comes from either the sempai or sensei urging "more spirit," thus pushing the students beyond their own boundaries. Without such encouragement, the mind would succumb to the weakened body and relent to exhaustion.

Karate-do actions demand repetition in order to make each technique execution as refined as possible. Continually striving to execute the so called, "perfect technique" or "perfect kata (型)" is analogous to the definition of a limit in calculus or simple math concept of infinity. For most, infinity is thought of as limitless expansion such as the number of stars in the universe. Another form of infinity is the continual subdivision of a number whereby zero conceivable can never be reached. If you divide the number 2 in half the result is one, and if one is divided in half the result is half, and each division becomes infinitesimally smaller fraction with no conceivable means of reaching zero. In a similar manner, karate-ka continues to practice to minimize as much as possible to refine the techniques and movements towards perfecting their skills, in such a way as to make it more efficient and effective. But with human mental and physical imperfection as variables, it is inconceivable that one can reach the ultimate state of perfection consistently with each execution. However close we may come, there's always room for ever so slight improvement. When we become satisfied with reaching perfection is when we no longer progress.

Thus, seeking perfection is about the journey towards incrementally progressing. As the path becomes progressively more difficult, the human spirit must become even stronger. Austere training in karate-do is about continuing to drive the mental and physical to the limit. In this way the practitioner learns to become relentless in overcoming one hurdle after another. The spirit that is being forged in the dojo is to prepare the karate-ka to apply the same level of effort in endeavors outside the dojo as well. Without effort there is no level of success.

Success is not based solely on talent. And all men are not created equal, in a sense that we are not all blessed with the speed of Usain Bolt, or gifted with the mental intelligence of Stephen Hawking or Albert Einstein. What defines success is the application of one's potential to exceed expectations. Whether a person is gifted or not, the drive to excel achieves success. At 5 feet, six inches, Spud Webb not only played professional basketball against many of his counterparts exceeding the height of 6 feet, 5 inches, but also won the slam dunk competition in a game where height is a major factor. Obviously, he possessed talent, but he also worked diligently to exceed expectation. Sometimes those with the God given gift of physical talent or genius IQ may squander the opportunity for success by not putting in the effort, since most achievements comes to them without much effort.

As with talent, equality does not exist in the social climate; some are born into impoverished families while others are wealthy at birth. What determines how certain people succeed is not based on where they start, but instead on their path and the desire to succeed.

Maximizing one's potential and seeking perfection does not necessarily mean to excel at multitude of things or become the best. Each in their own way can improve to the level that surpasses their own and other's expectation. Karate-do training enables a non-athletic person or even those with physical disabilities to go beyond their own abilities. They may not obtain the same level of desired perfection that other karate-ka with athletic agility, but each level of accomplishment builds the confidence in the individual and furthers their potential. Misunderstanding such benefits, some laymen would believe karate-do cannot be practiced by those uncoordinated, disabled, or ail of health. On the contrary, karate-do training can improve one's coordination, agility, and overall health. Some notable Okinawan karate-do masters, such as Nagamine Shoshin and Funakoshi Gichin began training at an early age to overcome their ill health condition. As a result of their relentless training in karate-do, Nagamine and Funakoshi not only overcame their ill health, but lived until the right old age of 90 and 88 years old respectively.

Much of one's success and failure in life can be attributed not only to one's skill but character as well. It is no surprise that a person interviewing for a prospective job would present their best character

traits during the interview process. The ability to perform the prescribed job functions is usually evaluated with the candidate's disposition in an interview. Even the simple act of ordering food at restaurants can mean good or bad service, depending upon the character of the patron. Waiters and waitresses are more willing to provide good service to customers with good attitudes rather than to the demanding ones. People tend to avoid those with bad character traits, whether in school or at work, because no one wants to associate with them. One's character is judged daily for various situations; from both the people we know and from strangers.

In seeking perfection, character is often overlooked, since the physical attributes of the individual is more prominently displayed. In sports, some professional teams have even ignored bad behaviors of talented players in hopes that they will win games. But in the long run the character flaw becomes more of a hindrance and disruption to the team. Sometimes an average player with a good character is more beneficial to the team than a talented player with a poor attitude. Winning as a team requires good chemistry amongst the players. The infamous 1980 U.S. Olympic Ice Hockey team that defeated the heavily favorite Soviet team consisted of players that the coach, Herb Brooks, selected that would play well together, not necessarily the most talented hockey players. The same holds true in a work environment – teamwork is more beneficial to a company than a smart employee who is unwilling to work with others. Ideally the desire is to have both talent and good character. Hence in seeking perfection, both refinement of physical attributes and talent as well as one's character is of equal importance.

Funakoshi's introduction of karate-do to Japan would have most likely failed if not for one major factor – his character. In an era where Okinawans were not looked upon favorably by the Japanese, introducing an indigenous martial art most likely was scrutinized with skepticism by the Japanese audience. Funakoshi being well educated and a scholar in classical Chinese, was very astute in recognizing the importance of presenting karate-do for the purpose of physical education and perfecting an individual's character as opposed to demonstrating some of the lethal self-defense techniques with the use of bare hands. While we may never know what actually transpired during

Funakoshi's first auspicious demonstration to the Japanese ministry, we can surmise it was presented with proper mannerism and etiquette. To do so otherwise would have brought consternation from the Japanese audience so enriched with honorific culture.



Dojo Principles (*Building Character*)

“Put karate into your everyday living; that is how to see its true beauty.” Funakoshi Gichin

This was one of the main precepts Funakoshi Gichin impressed upon his students. Of course, it can be easily interpreted to mean being aware of your surroundings and not be caught off guard against an unwelcomed attack. Funakoshi was certainly a proponent of always being vigilant whenever and wherever, as Nakayama Masatoshi (one of Funakoshi's most senior students) recounts how Funakoshi would randomly test his students, even while eating in restaurants. When one of his students held the chopsticks improperly, Funakoshi would show, without harming the student, how an adversary could jam it down their throat. But as important as being vigilant was for Funakoshi, training meant students applied what they were taught in the dojo ([道場](#)) to everyday life. How do you handle life's challenges, overcome hardship, and interact with others? The basic foundation for guiding the students were laid out in the five main principles known as, Dojo Kun ([道場訓](#)) by Funakoshi. Subset of the Dojo Kun ([道場訓](#)) are 20 additional principles that Funakoshi wrote, called, Niju Kun, meaning Twenty Principles.

The Dojo Kun ([道場訓](#)) is the principles by which all karate-do students are to live by. It is recited at most traditional karate-do dojo ([道場](#)) at the beginning and sometimes at the end of each class, as a reminder to each karate-ka the importance of training with the right purpose in mind. Prior to reciting the principles, the word, “hitotsu” is said earnestly for each one, meaning “number one.” The significance of which is to imply no one principle is viewed as more important than the other - making them all of equal importance. Interestingly there are no mention of improving technical skills or mastering self-defense elements in these 5 main principles. Thus, the Dojo Kun ([道場訓](#)) promotes the assimilation of karate-do into daily living, which may act as a guiding philosophy ([道場訓](#)) in the effort to perpetually improve oneself and contribute to the larger society. Listed below is the simplified interpretation of the Dojo Kun ([道場訓](#)) in English,

followed by the pronunciation in romanji and the literal translation in Japanese below in parenthesis.

- Respect others – to honor the principles of etiquette
 - 一、礼儀を重んずること
 - *hitotsu, reigi wo omonzuru koto*

(Paying courtesy)

- Refrain from violent behavior – to guard against impetuous courage
 - 一、血気の勇を戒むること
 - *hitotsu, kekki no yū wo imashimuru koto*

(To admonish the courage of blood)

- Endeavor – to foster the spirit of effort
 - 一、努力の精神を養うこと
 - *hitotsu, doryoku no seishin wo yashinau koto*

(Foster the spirit of effort)

- Be faithful – to protect and defend the path of truth
 - 一、誠の道を守ること
 - *hitotsu, makoto no michi wo mamoru koto*

(To protect the way of truth)

- Seek perfection of character – to strive for perfection of character
 - 一、人格 完成に 努める こと
 - *hitotsu, jinkaku kansei ni tsutomeru koto*

(Working to complete a personality)

The wording is brief and meant to be thought provoking. Many have translated and interpreted the meaning behind the Dojo Kun(道場

訓) . The attempt here is simply to briefly discuss the meaning of each principles and how it can be applied in our daily life.

Respect

Japanese culture is an honorific society. The honorific hierarchy is embedded in the language itself. Depending on the class and age of the individual, the person being spoken to must be addressed by the proper title, i.e., san, sensei, chan, sama, et. al. But unlike Western culture, the title comes after the person's surname since the family name is considered of utmost importance in the Asian culture. For example, it is more appropriate to address the sensei as, Funakoshi Sensei instead of Sensei Funakoshi.

In terms of hierarchy, the title of sama is reserved for those of high status or superior importance. The title is somewhat like in the Western culture of, "Your Highness," or "Your Excellency." Even though it is used at the highest level, it is quite common in Japan to address customers with the use of sama. Since the customer is considered of high importance to any industry, such as a restaurant, it is common to hear customers being referred to as, *okyaku-sama* .

Grammar structure also reflects how one should speak to another of higher status. But the honor of respect is bestowed upon the person rather than demanding it. When introducing oneself one's title is not stated, even as a sensei, e.g. "I am Smith-sensei," would not be appropriate. Instead simply, "My name is Smith." The honor of the title is bestowed upon by the recipient. Sometimes this is misconstrued in Western culture to imply the person does not want to be addressed by a title. On the contrary, as the person humbles themselves, the honor and respect of the title is appropriately bestowed upon them. It becomes disrespectful not to address the sensei or anyone else by title. Such is the level of respect that is entrenched into the Japanese culture.

From the moment a karate student enters the dojo, he or she bows before entering as a sign of respect. Students also bow when they greet the sensei or sempai. This simple act of respect is extended onto the dojo floor as well during training when facing a partner to spar or exchange of techniques in drills. The symbolic gesture of bowing to one's partner also has the implication of extending gratitude towards the other for assisting in the training to make one better.

Respect being one of the more familiar principles applies everywhere in our lives; at work, interfacing with others, at home, and even with ourselves. To apply a sign of respect by bowing in our daily lives would seem very odd in the Western culture. However, respect is not just about the gesture as much as the actual intent itself. If one can extend respect towards others, the feeling becomes more mutual. Respect is a characteristic that is promoted from the moment we are taught how to behave as a child. Earning someone's respect and respecting others is an important trait that defines how we coexist with others.

Refrain from Violent Behavior

Practicing an art which entails aggressive attacks and defense against one another may seem oxymoronic to the principle of "Refrain from violent behavior." Karate-do is not about learning how to fight, but rather how to avoid a fight. The old cliché, "A little bit of knowledge can be dangerous," is applicable to young karate-ka (in terms of experience) that are tempted to test their newly acquired skills outside the dojo. In some cases, it may be for a just cause in assisting others in peril, or purely to boast their bravado. Either way, violent behavior only results in more violence. This is not only foolish but also dangerous for both parties involved.

To the average person, avoiding a fight may be conceived as cowardice. But in reality, it requires more courage to refrain from fighting. Mahatma Gandhi, knowing full well he would be beaten with clubs at the hands of the British soldiers, never once retaliated physically and preached only non-violence. Very few will have the fortitude that Gandhi possessed, since basic human instinct is to retaliate when confronted by violent behavior. As a result of his courage and non-violent approach, Gandhi was able to liberate India from British rule. Imagine how many lives would have been lost if Gandhi's approach were to instill violent retaliation. Martin Luther King Jr. would later adopt Gandhi's non-violent method during the civil rights protest.

If the intent is not to engage in fighting, why then does karate-do training revolve around sparring with each other? The purpose of training how to defend and counterattack in the dojo, is to develop a sense of awareness to aggressive behavior. Continued training to the level of perfecting such fighting skills is to heighten one's ability, such that if no other option is available but to engage in physical confrontation, a method of self-protection exists. The more advance the karate-ka trains the ability exists to control the opponent's actions or their will to fight instead of resorting to physical violence.

Endeavor

Effort is an imperative element to achieve success at any level. During dojo training, the sensei barks out commands and students respond with a spirited shout, "*Ousu* (押忍)." "*Ousu*" is derived from the contraction of two Japanese words, "push" and "endurance." The word is also used in greeting the sensei as well as an acknowledgement. In effect, by saying "*Ousu*," the student is letting the sensei know that he will put all his effort hence forth – pushing one's endurance to the max. This constant reinforcement of the level of effort required in the dojo also applies to any field of endeavor.

In a perfect world, everyone would be smart and attend a prestigious university and ultimately providing a great contribution to a company or society. The reality is companies hire people of various intellect as well as skill sets. What defines success between a gifted smart person and an average person is the amount of effort that is applied. An employer would be better served to have an average employee that gives 100% effort towards a defined goal, as opposed to relying on a smart employee that does not put in much effort.

As the tale of the rabbit versus the tortoise tells of a race where the rabbit having a large lead, loses the race to a slower opposition by taking a nap instead of finishing the race. Traditional moral of the story is to never underestimate a weaker opponent, or slow and steady wins. This tale also reinforces that success is not based on how much talent you have initially, as much as how you use what you have and put in the effort. Persistence and determination can achieve positive results, no

matter the level of talent. The tortoise's determination to finish the race ultimately made him the victor over a superior opponent.

Be Faithful

Loyalty is a strong tradition that has been extended from the Confucian influence onto the family and martial arts. Being faithful is a commitment that one makes when learning the art from their sensei. After many years of training, the sensei is no longer just an instructor, but a guiding figure for the students. As the sensei puts forth all his knowledge for the student to learn, the student is expected to remain faithful to the sensei.

“When the student is ready, the sensei will come.” Japanese adage.

The other part of this principle is in regard to protecting the way of truth or in other words, guiding others toward the proper path. Japanese culture places emphasis on the mentoring system of sempai and kohai relationship, senior and junior respectively. This relationship fosters respect for authority and transference of knowledge from the senior to the junior. In doing so, it is also the responsibility of the sempai to guide the kohai towards the proper direction, not only in the dojo, but also in life following the ethical principles.

Seek Perfection of Character

Character and personality traits are used interchangeably by the average populace without the realization that the two have distinct differences. Personality is an inherited trait considered to be immutable, while character is a learned behavior that can be malleable over time. Personality is reflected by the outer appearance and behavior that may not be true to the inner character. The common expression, “you can't change his character any more than you can change the spot on a leopard,” is more reflective of a person's personality than their character.

Character focuses on mental and moral qualities of a person, which is heavily based on social and environmental influences. Character is one's belief that can be altered over time. In order to perfect one's character, the desire must be there to want to improve. Contrary to popular belief, learning karate-do does not necessarily improve a person's character as much as it reveals that person's character. Learning an art which entails the ability to overcome another person, can lead to potential character flaw. Possession of power always invites arrogance, if not guided properly by moral principles. "Seek Perfection of Character" is to become a better person with a sense of propriety through the practice of karate-do.

Dojo kun(道場訓) is not unique only to Shotokan karate style or to Funakoshi's teaching. Other styles of karate-do also emphasize similar principles associated with their teaching of how students should behave in learning the art. Below are a few examples:

Goju-ryu

- Be humble and polite
- Train considering your physical strength
- Practice earnestly with creativity
- Be calm and swift
- Take care of your health
- Live in plain life
- Do not be too proud or modest
- Continue your training with patience

Shorinji-ryu

- Maintain propriety, etiquette, dignity and grace
- Gain self-understanding by tasting the true meaning of combat
- Search for pure principle of being: truth, justice, beauty
- Exercise a positive personality; confidence, courage, and determination

- Always seek to develop the character aiming towards perfection and complete harmony with creation. (三士訓)

Niju Kun (二土訓)

Funakoshi also wrote 20 additional principles, known as, Niju Kun (二土訓), which are the subset of the Dojo Kun(道場訓). Niju Kun (二土訓) includes training principles and moral principles for the student to abide by.

1. Do not forget that karate begins with a bow and ends with bow.
2. In karate there is no first attack.
3. One who practices karate must follow the way of justice.
4. Know yourself first, then you can know others.
5. Spirit and mind are more important than technique.
6. Be ready to release your mind.
7. Misfortune comes out of idleness.
8. Don't think that what you learn in karate can't be used outside the dojo.
9. It will take all of your life to learn karate.
10. Put karate into your everyday living; that is how to see its true beauty.
11. Karate is just like water; if you do not give it continuous heat, it will become cold.
12. Do not cling to the idea of winning; it is the idea of not losing that is necessary.
13. Move according to your opponent.
14. In conflict, you must discern the vulnerable from the invulnerable points.
15. Consider your opponent's legs and arms as you would lethal weapons.
16. Be aware at all times that you have millions of potential opponents.
17. Postured stance is for beginners; later comes naturalness.
18. Kata is about correct and proper form; engaging in a fight is something else.
19. Do not forget: 1) strength and weakness of power; 2) contraction and expansion of body; and 3) rhythm of techniques.
20. Always create and devise.

Karate ni sente nashi (空手に先手なし)

Of all the precepts in Funakoshi's Niju Kun (二 十 訓) , the most often paraphrased is, "Karate ni sente nashi (空手に先手なし)," translated meaning, "Karate has no offense." It is also the most misinterpreted and misunderstood phrase. Some have literally interpreted as, there are no offensive techniques in karate - only defense. Others have interpreted as one should not strike first when attacked, leading them to believe is the reason why the first movement in all kata (型) begins with a block.

The underlying meaning of this precept is never to use karate for ill intention or resorting to violence as the first or only solution. First, never provoke a fight or be in a position of danger. How to stop or avoid the danger becomes the response to "Karate ni sente nashi(空手に先手なし)." In a violent confrontation, human beings revert to their animal instinct and their senses are heightened. If the danger is imminent, the karate-ka can diffuse the attack with their own action – be it block and countering or taking the initiative to strike first. To allow the assailant to execute the first strike before countering could be detrimental to one's safety or others. Most people think of self-defense as protecting only themselves. There may be instances where loved ones are involved. If the assailant attempts to strike a loved one first, such as a child, chances are the guardian will not allow the first blow to hit the child.

Karate ni sente nashi (空手に先手なし) is another way of reminding karate-do students to refrain from violent behavior, and not to initiate a fight, physically or verbally.

武

道

Budo Aspect

“In true Budo, there are no opponents. In true Budo we seek to be one with all things, to return to the heart of creation. In real budo, there are no real enemies. Real Budo is a function of love. The way of a warrior is not to destroy and kill but to foster life, to continually create. Love is the divinity that can really protect us.” Ueshiba Morihei, Founder of Aikido

A young student traveled to Japan to a famous martial art school and had an audience with the sensei.

“Sensei,” asked the student, politely, “I wish to become your student.” He then proceeded to ask, “how long will it take to become a black belt?”

“Ten years at least” replied the sensei.

“Ten years is a long time. What if I study twice as hard as the other students? How long will it take then?” asked the student.

“Twenty years,” responded the sensei.

“Twenty years! What if I study day and night, how long will it take?” said the student.

“Thirty years” sensei responded.

“How is it that every time I say I will train harder; you tell me it will take longer?” asked the puzzled student.

“The answer is easy. When one eye is fixed on the destination, there is only one eye left to find the Way.” Said the sensei.

The word “do ” or “Tao” in Chinese, is simply defined as, “the Way.” Anyone with some familiarity of Chinese or Japanese kanji will recognize the character for “do ” to have two meanings, “road” and “way.” However, the exact meaning of “do ” or “Tao” is ineffable in English, which is beyond the scope of this book. The more pragmatic interpretation, used by the Japanese to mean, “the Way” eludes to the act of seeking the path while studying an art form. Thus, many of the Japanese martial arts have the “do ” associated with the art, such as, Budo(武道), Judo, Aikido (合氣道), Kyudo(弓道), Kendo (剣道), and Iaido (居合道), to name a few. The use of “do ” is not strictly for martial arts as many other Japanese art forms are also associated with the use of do : Chado (茶道) (tea ceremony), Kado(華道) (flower arrangement), and Shodo (書道) (calligraphy), as a

few examples. The inference of using “do ” with each of the art is to suggest a lifetime of commitment is to be made to studying the art.

More than just studying the art, “do ” is about living it in our daily life, as the sensei’s response to the eager student suggests in the above parable. When a student is fixated on only achieving a particular goal in the art, he is not experiencing it in his daily life, hence will require more time to understand and realize the “do ” aspect of the art. An analogous example is of a student who is all consumed in obtaining a college degree in an academic subject and neglects social interaction with others. By studying harder than anyone else to achieve the goal in a shorter time, he or she would have missed the life lessons that college had to offer. Once removed from the academia life, the student’s ability to interact with others socially becomes perhaps awkward, not necessarily in the characterization of an introvert versus extrovert, but like the cliché; “all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.” Simplistic example in relationship to “do ,” but the point of walking “the Way” is to experience all that one encounters throughout the process.

Prior to the use of “do ,” “jutsu (術) ,” meaning “art” was used as the suffix after each martial art, e.g. Bu-jutsu, Ju-jutsu, Aiki-jutsu, etc. The distinction between “do ” and “jutsu (術) ” is often misunderstood and interpreted to be the same. *Jutsu* (術) , being the predecessor to “do ,” became the method for developing martial skills to win in combat. But “do ” meant something greater than winning or losing for the practitioner – it is a way to enrich one’s life through the rigors of physical and mental training. *Jutsu* is not discarded for the sake of “do ” but rather enhanced to provide a means for the student to reach a higher level of wisdom. This is not to imply “do ” to be better than “jutsu (術) ” or vice versa. In fact, some masters prefer to retain the *jutsu* (術) suffix in order to maintain the pure martial elements of the art, as in the case of Ju-jutsu and some Aiki-jutsu. But the use of “do ” suggests a martial art to have evolved from a total combat form to one that seeks to perfect an individual’s character for seeking peace and wisdom.

In seeking this “Way” of developing one’s character, it is important to note the reference of “do ” when referring to the place of studying the art called, dojo. Dojo is commonly translated as, training hall or place of training a particular martial art. But the significance of “do ” should

be understood to mean the place to train “the Way.” Even the uniform, commonly referred to as, “gi,” is properly named, do-gi(道着) to make the distinction of wearing something unique when pursuing the study of “do.” Whether the omission of “do” in gi, and likewise in casual referencing of karate, is purely for the sake of simplicity or naiveté, the importance of studying “do” must be understood as part of art, where proper attire, place of training, and proper etiquette should be observed. Those who fail to understand the practice of “do” will not bother to keep the dojo or their do-gi (道着) clean. Karate-do of course, can be practiced anywhere with any type of garment, but when training in the dojo, proper manners and etiquette are practice so that the student can extend this behavior outside the dojo. The importance of training in the dojo is emphasized by Okinawan karate-do master, Nagamine Shoshin:

“The dojo is a place where courage is fostered and superior human nature is bred through the ecstasy of sweating in hard work. It is the sacred place where the human spirit is polished.”

Traditional Japanese martial arts all fall under the umbrella of Budo (武道), which in English is translated to simply mean, “Martial Way,” which is usually conceived to be war-like. The Chinese character or Japanese kanji for “Bu” is a combined ideogram to mean, ‘stop’ and ‘halberd,’ referencing a weapon. While “Martial Way” explicitly refers to method of war or fighting, the ideogram for “Bu” is implicitly understood to mean, ‘stop a weapon.’ Budo (武道), therefore, becomes a method of seeking ways to prevent or stop the use of a weapon or fighting. The simplistic definition of “Martial way” lends itself to viewing Budo(武道) only from one perspective – way of fighting. The more profound view of Budo(武道) is to enrich the practitioner’s life, in terms of health, mind and knowledge, preventing violence, and forging a person with moral values.

When budo (武道) or bujutsu (武術) is mentioned, most naïve karate-ka these days would reference the samurai warrior, believing they must train with the same intrepid attitude of kill or be killed. Certainly, karate-do training forges an indomitable spirit within the practitioner, but it is not only this aspect that defines a samurai. While the mention of a samurai is associated with courage and

relentless spirit, many do not realize that the title of samurai itself is one of servitude, which elevates them above the status of a warrior. As a servant and protector to a lord, a samurai is bound by duty and the code of Bushido (武士道) (translated as, military knight way, or ‘way of the warrior’). The code of Bushido (武士道) has the same chivalrous character for the samurai as the Code of Chivalry required of the, often romanticized, knights of medieval times. Even though it may be hard to find such chivalrous behavior today, the budo (武道) aspect of martial arts continues to promote the valuable characteristics outlined in the code of bushido (武士道) : honor, sincerity, veracity, loyalty, and benevolence. The misguided thought is that karate-ka trains with the same code as the samurai, which is incorrectly relating the code of bushido(武士道) to budo(武道) . Bushido (武士道) refers to the way of the samurai, with the intent to kill and to commit seppuku, ritual suicide, if necessary, to retain honor. Budo (武道) , on the other hand, implies martial arts being practiced preserving life and to bring about peaceful coexistence for the martial artist. To simply state that one trains like a samurai warrior is to incorrectly ignore the more important qualities that is defined by the practice of budo(武道) ; a person with integrity and honor.

Understanding budo (武道) is not only about possessing a skill but also about shedding that which is unwanted in a human trait. True testament of budo (武道) was displayed during one of the most unforeseen karate demonstrations by a highly skilled karate-do sensei. At the height of karate’s popularity in the United States during the 1960’s and 1970’s, demonstration from the great Japanese masters became highlights of tournaments. Many such demonstrations were executed with such precision that would leave the audiences in awe. But the one demonstration that stunned the crowd had less to do with the awesome technical skills of the master, as much as the outcome of the demonstration. The following is an account of the infamous demonstration by Nishiyama Hidetaka Sensei.

Nishiyama Sensei performed the kata called, Hangetsu, with such intensity that left the audience wanting to see more. After the solo performance, he demonstrated the application of the kata with multiple attackers from various directions. To make the application even more

intense, the attackers were armed with knives and clubs. As if in a Zen state, Nishiyama went through his motions adeptly eliminating one attacker after another. In the processes of disarming one of the would-be attackers wielding a knife, Nishiyama struck the knife out of the hand of the demonstrating partner, which landed in a precarious position. When the attacker was swept off his feet, Nishiyama realized the potential danger to the demonstrator if he landed on the dangerous knife, held the demonstrator and stopped the flow of his demonstration. The rhythm of the demo had now been disrupted, allowing the other attackers with clubs to descend upon the great Japanese Sensei. In a state of dismay, the two attackers were shocked that Sensei had left himself so open to the attack, which was rehearsed without error in the dojo. When they realized what Nishiyama Sensei had done to prevent a potentially dangerous outcome for the other attacker, the demonstrators bowed to Nishiyama Sensei and ended the demonstration.

To the audience, the demonstration ended abruptly with what would be considered less than perfect execution by a great karate master. At that moment, the bewildered audience had no idea what had transpired, other than witnessing a demonstration that was flawed. But to the demonstrators and some karate-ka in the audience, they had just witnessed a great Sensei who had displayed the true meaning of budo (武道). Nishiyama Sensei knowing he would be exposed to being attacked by the clubs, had sacrificed his own demonstration to save the knife wielding attacker from injury. The audience would have certainly glorified his outstanding skills had he proceeded in completing the demonstration with no regards for the safety of the knife welding student. By saving the student from potential harm, Nishiyama Sensei had shed his ego for the safety of another human being.

“To work on learning is to increase day by day; to work on Tao is to decrease day by day.” Tao Te Ching.

If budo(武道) is perceived to be only a martial method of defeating an opponent, then other forms of “do ” arts are relegated to only the defined discipline, e.g. Chado (茶道), only for serving tea, or Kado(華道), only for flower arrangement. All the “do ” arts seek the truth and understanding through their respective art form. The idea of following the “do ” is to elevate the individual in their respective discipline from which they learn to become a better person. And in turn

the individual is able to better serve society. The extension of these “do ” art forms is embedded into the culture of Japanese society as part of “Wa,” meaning harmony, and integral to the understanding of the arts. The martial spirit aspect of budo (武道) is part of karate-do training, just as much as the refined skills required to make and serve tea is part of Chado (茶道) . But the true understanding of budo (武道) is about living life in harmony through practicing the arts.

To the uninformed karate-ka, the casual use of the term budo (武道) is simply for expressing the martial spirit. The interpretation of “bu ” to stop a weapon becomes mainly about the ability to stop the opponent’s weapon by fighting. And the cry for “budo (武道) spirit” is to invoke an indomitable fighting spirit to defeat the opponent. Such narrow-minded thought process is to limit the skill of the karate-ka to focus purely on fighting skills. A tiger has more fighting spirit than any human being. But the tiger does not possess the skill level or the wisdom to control their action. The drive for more “spirit” is to encourage the karate-ka to push through with unrelenting effort and overcome their physical limitation. The application of “budo (武道) spirit” goes beyond the ability to fight. The true mastery of budo(武道) is controlling the outcome.

One of the revealing demonstrations of budo (武道) in action was witnessed by Kano Jigoro, Founder of Judo. When Kano first witnessed Ueshiba Morihei’s (Founder of Aikido) demonstration of aikido (合氣道) he remarked, “This is ideal Budo(武道) .” Ueshiba’s fluid motions dispatched his would-be attackers with ease, without causing harm as each of the attackers were thrown to the ground. Often Ueshiba’s demonstrations would have multiple opponents attacking from various directions both sequentially and simultaneously. Ueshiba had not only mastered the technical skills of his art but was able to demonstrate the essence of budo (武道) – controlling and harmonizing with the opponents’ actions.

“Three essential elements of budo are; the timing of heaven, the utility of earth, and the harmonization of human beings.” Koden Bugei

“All things have an inner divine essence and an outer marvelous function. The essence of a tree is manifested in its wonderful blossom and abundant foliage. The essence of tree could not be perceived if there were no blossom and leaves. Human beings have an inner divine essence that cannot be seen but is manifested as the marvelous techniques of budo.” Heiho Jinkansho, Kajima Shinto School

Ichi Go, Ichi E – One Moment, One Chance

“Ichi Go, Ichi E (一期一会)” is a Japanese idiom meaning, “one period, one meeting,” or “one moment, one chance.” Originally derived from ceremonial Chado (茶道), serving of tea, the concept is that the tea master takes care in making preparation for that one time gathering, which is to be cherished by the recipient. Of course, the tea master may have many such gatherings, but no matter how many times the ceremonial tea is performed or served, no two occasions will be the same. Thus, the idiom is a reminder that each moment being unique must be cherished as if it was the last time.

Ichi Go Ichi E (一期一会) can easily be relevant to martial arts in terms of one moment, one chance execution. The stroke of the sword can determine life or death. There is no do-over. As in the case of Shodo (書道), the art of calligraphy, once the brush stroke is made, there is no going back for a touch up. Karate-ka’s performance of a kata, whether in competition or in the dojo, is for that moment only, which cannot be repeated the same way twice. In kumite (組手), the opponent’s opening provides that one chance window for a strike or counterattack. Any slight hesitation results in a missed opportunity. Ichi Go Ichi E (一期一会) is also a reminder of being in the moment rather than looking ahead.

One of the most common training in the dojo is called, “ippon kumite,” or one-step sparring. Ippon kumite is a pre-arranged attack and counterattack performed by two karate-ka. The attacker makes it known to the defender ahead of time where and with what technique he or she will be executing in a single one-step action. The defender has one chance to block and/or shift to counter the attacker. It is incumbent upon the attacker to go all out in executing the technique for that one chance one execution. The sequence of movements in ippon kumite resembles an exercise and may seem unrealistic in terms or practicality in self-defense applications, but it is a teaching regiment to apply the idea of ichi go ichi e (一期一会) in karate-do. That singular moment is also a way of developing strong basic attack and counter actions.

From the budo (武道) perspective, ichi go ichi e (一期一会) goes beyond the idea of defeat or victory in combat – it is about doing one’s best. In the case of partner drills in the dojo, ippon kumite as an

example, imagine the result if the attacker did not commit to doing his or her best and only attacking with half intensity. The defender's reaction will slow down to the level of the attacker and the defender will not benefit from this training. The purpose of training with a partner is to learn from each other and by doing one's best, both parties can improve. This then becomes the preparation for that one chance encounter that could be averted using proper reaction and response. The Chado (茶道) master does not prepare tea haphazardly in hopes of getting a second chance, any more than a karate-ka confronts an assailant carelessly, since the assailant has only one intention – inflict harm. Doing one's best is all that is ever asked of in any endeavor in life. The result may not always produce a win, but the approach should always be about not losing. Training with the mindset that you only have one chance to get it right enables the student to do their best. If a mistake occurs in training, it is in the face of defeat is when a student learns the most.

Ichi go ichi e (一期一会) is also about that one chance, one moment encounter of meeting someone. The impressions from an initial meeting can become significant. Some encounters plant seed that may take root in the future, while others could have life changing effect from that single moment. When such momentous meeting will or may occur is unknown. Generally, the average person will apply such a mindset of once in a lifetime meeting with the chance to meet some celebrity – be it a movie star, producer, famous athlete, or CEO, in hopes of getting an opportunity to be noticed for whatever reason. But genuine encounters can arise from all walks of life, with sometimes unpredictable outcome that are positive, i.e. meeting one's soulmate, or friend for life, or inspiring others. It becomes prudent to keep ichi go ichi e (一期一会) in mind when meeting others for the first time.

Meeting the karate-do sensei for the first time essentially plants the seed for what is to come for the student. The sensei, for the most part, becomes the mentor and role model for the students to follow, even if that is not the intent of the sensei. The impressionable student seeks the guidance of the sensei, sometimes to the point of blind obedience. Hence it is incumbent upon the sensei to properly guide the student towards the correct path.

Some encounters may not plant seed for the future, but it must be cherished for that moment since it will not occur again. Just as no one can bring back time, ichi go ichi e (一期一会) is a reminder to seize the present. An example of a movie character that lived by this idiom is Forest Gump, the movie by the same name. Forest Gump is portrayed as appreciating living for that moment and not thinking about what is to come. Interestingly the movie, “Forest Gump” is titled, “Ichi Go Ichi E” in Japan.

As part of budo(武道), ichi go ichi e (一期一会) extends beyond the martial aspect of simply taking the one chance opportunity to strike or defeat an opponent. Training in karate- do is also about the opportunity to meet new partners whether in the dojo, seminar, or training camp environment. As much as karate is an individual experience, it is also the catalyst for social interaction amongst people with common interest. Karate has become an international event with tournaments and seminars, the chance meeting may be a once in a lifetime moment that must be cherished.

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Art of Fighting Without Fighting

“An enemy you vanquish remains your enemy. An enemy you convince, becomes your friend.” Chinese proverb.

An arrogant swordsman boarded a ferry on the way across several islands. While on board, he boasted of his sword fighting skills and challenged anyone on board. His antagonistic approach made everyone on the ferry apprehensive, except for one older swordsman, who sat calmly ignoring the uproar. Unbeknownst to the challenger, the old swordsman was Bokuden Tsukara, the legendary samurai. Intrigued by the old man's demeanor, the arrogant swordsman asked him, “What style of sword do you practice?” “The style I practice is known as, the sword of no sword,” Bokuden replied. Annoyed by the perplexed response, the arrogant swordsman demanded a match. After several refusal to the challenge, Bokuden relented and said, “I'll accept your challenge, but we should do it elsewhere so that no one on the ferry gets injured.” Bokuden suggested taking the smaller boat attached to the ferry to a small island nearby, to which the challenger agreed. As Bokuden rowed the boat and approached the beach, the arrogant swordsman eagerly jumped off and started to warm up with his sword in anticipation for the big match. While the challenger waved his sword in various fighting motions, Bokuden remained on the boat and proceeded to row away from the beach. When the arrogant challenger finally noticed the boat had departed deep into the water, Bokuden shouted out, “This is the sword of no sword.”

This legendary tale of Bokuden's encounter on the ferry is a good example of how a veteran martial artist is able to defeat his opponent without having to resort to violence. So well-known is this tale that the same story line was re-enacted in the famous Bruce Lee movie, “Enter the Dragon.” But what significance does this non-fighting have with martial arts, especially in a movie where the audience expects action? It demonstrates the relevance of developing your ability to such a high level that wisdom is the weapon that ultimately prevails over technical prowess. In the end it serves even a greater purpose in that no harm came to either side and perhaps the conflict ends amicably.

Another notable tale of a skilled exponent thwarting his opponent without fighting is one about the famous swordsman, Musashi

Miyamoto.

Three swordsmen sat in a crowded Japanese tavern making loud noises hoping to provoke a duel with Musashi, who sat alone eating his meal and seemingly ignoring the advances of the three swordsmen. Without glancing at the three swordsmen, Musashi took his chopsticks and quickly snatched four flies out of midair. After witnessing this feat, the three swordsmen quickly left the tavern abandoning any thought of challenging Musashi. The three challengers were not only astonished by Musashi's ability to catch the flies with his chopsticks, but probably more afraid of his awareness of the situation and calmness of his demeanor.

It is always stimulating to read legendary stories of great masters from the past being able to foil their opponent either by wit or superhuman skills. Exploits like these tend to get exaggerated to the point of seemingly apocryphal tales, especially when so little is documented accurately in the past. But thwarting the opponent without resorting to violent confrontation are not just legendary stories of the past as C.W. Nicols, the author of "Moving Zen" recounts how Kanazawa Hirokazu Sensei avoided a fight against a would-be challenger, circa 1960.

In a restaurant, a loudmouth challenged Kanazawa Sensei to a fight, probably to boast of his skill against a karate-ka. "Fine" Kanazawa said, "but before we fight I must first warm up." With that Sensei Kanazawa did a sequence of six or seven blindingly fast moves in the empty air, shook his shoulders and smiled at the challenger. "Shall we fight? All warmed up now!" The loudmouth went back to his seat. Kanazawa Sensei had won a fight without resorting to fighting – mastering the highest method of winning.

The best fighter is often thought to be the one with the most skills that can vanquish an opponent with ease. But the sincere study of traditional karate-do, like all budo (武道) arts is to refrain from violence. Long history of martial study reveals three methods on how to win a fight:

1. Winning after fighting
2. Fighting after winning
3. Winning without fighting

Winning After Fighting

The first method of winning a fight is by engaging in combat with an adversary in order to seek victory. This is considered the lowest level in terms of skill, even though those who are proponent for fighting would view it as the ultimate tests of their martial skills. This is often the case with new students in karate who are eager to test what they have learned in class to an actual street fight, believing it would provide some validation of their training or effectiveness of their techniques. But what the young students (young in terms of experience) in karate does not realize is, there is no victor in such fighting scenarios. Ultimately someone will be injured, if not both parties, and the repercussion could be detrimental possibly resulting in arrest or lawsuits, regardless of who may have initiated the fight. Victory is never certain.

Winning after fighting is typical of the impulsive response based on the animal instinct that resides in human beings. The skill level is not just about the physical ability, but also the mental state of the person. As an example, children can easily be provoked into fighting over simple matters, since their mental maturity level to rationalize conflict has yet to be refined – animal instinct takes over. However, the mental maturity of an adult can seemingly resolve conflicts without resorting to violence. Although in some cases even adults with poor judgement behave in similar manner to the maturity level of children. The desire to win after fighting then makes it the lowest skill level.

Fighting After Winning

The second method of winning involves complete preparation of all the conditions needed to win beforehand, which is considered the immediate level. This is the area where students train in kumite (組手) and practical applications with their partners to learn the various possible attacks and counterattacks. In this way the students train in a controlled environment allowing them to fully understand the potential outcome without injury or having repercussion from the law or retaliation. This is the level where majority of karate students spend years perfecting their skills.

This phase is not about transforming the karate-ka into a better fighter in a sense that they will be able to defeat other skilled opponents, but rather developing an awareness and learning how to control one's own actions in order to avoid a fight. In an actual encounter, other factors besides physical responses come in play, such as, psychological and emotional impact to the body. Any form of surprise attack causes one's nervous system to respond without thinking, which also heightens one's emotional level of anxiety. Training in the dojo with various partners at different skill levels enables the practitioner to learn how to control the stability of their own emotions during encounters. It also means continuing to train to improve even after we win or able to maintain control of our emotions in the dojo or at tournaments, thus fighting after winning.

Winning Without Fighting

The third method is considered the best of the three - winning without fighting. This is the stage where the warrior has full confidence in his skill level and does not need to prove it in battle, as in the case of Bokuden, Musashi, and Kanazawa. The warrior has become wise and learns to deal with confrontation in more peaceful way. It is by far the safest since no actual physical fight takes place, therefore, no possibility of losing exists. This is the ultimate skill of a warrior, as noted by the famous war strategist, Sun Tzu, ***“To win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the ultimate skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the ultimate skill.”*** It is towards this level that each karate-ka should strive to achieve - to win without fighting.

If the concept of learning how to fight in karate-do and avoiding a fight in real life seems perplexing and contradictory, the answer lies in understanding the development of martial arts. Hand to hand combat and battles have been fought between human beings since the history of mankind. Peaceful existence always dictated some form of self-protection and self-defense preparation against interlopers. The most notable existence of a peaceful order always being vigilant in self-defense preparation were the Shaolin (少林) monks.

Legend has it that the Shaolin (少林) monks were originally taught exercises by Daruma Tamo, an Indian monk, in order for them to be able to sustain long periods of meditation, supposedly lasting over several hours or even days. These exercises, coupled with the study of animal movements were thought to be the beginning of the Shaolin(少林) monks developing the renowned forms of martial arts, popularly known today as, kung fu (功夫) . The development of such martial arts was needed by the monks as a means of protection to fend off against unruly invaders and other intruders.

Shaolin (少林) monks were not the only ones developing mental and physical forms of martial arts during this period. Taoist priests were also creating martial methods that included internal energy called, “chi” (ki in Japanese), and credited with the development of Tai Chi Chuan (太極拳) . Women were also said to have developed styles based on efficiency of movements. Some of the more notable styles founded by women were Wing Chun and White Crane. Over time, the

martial practices transcended the singular purpose of mere self-defense, being influenced by philosophical thoughts and profound study of the martial methods for enhancing mind, body, and spirit.

One of the more influential philosophical thought came from the Tao te Ching, the famous writing of the philosopher, Lao Tzu. Based on the Tao principles of the yin and yang (陰陽), martial arts developed into a path for practitioners to seek a deeper understanding of balancing self-defense and self-preservation. The common misunderstanding about yin and yang (陰陽) is that they are two duality of opposing forces or that they are opposites. On the contrary, they are coexistent, and the basis of balance within the natural order of things. One side cannot exist without the other, just as man and woman, night and day, complement each other. More than complementing one another, the smaller circle within the yin and yang (陰陽) symbol signifies the importance of understanding that within each there exists its counterpart.

The yin/yang concept defines the coexistence of opposites. To understanding one is to appreciate the other. If we only experience daylight, one would not understand darkness. It is because of darkness that we appreciate and understand light. The experience of the fight, within the confines of the dojo is to understand how to win after fighting and realize the alternative to fighting. But the real fight is within us - the most formidable enemy.

Harmony – Wa (和)

The concept of learning martial arts to obtain harmonious coexistence is prevalent in all forms of traditional Asian fighting arts. When karate was first introduced to Japan from Okinawa by Funakoshi Gichin, many flocked to learn this new martial art, including some notables who had experiences in other forms of Japanese martial arts. One such notable who became one of Funakoshi's top students was, Otsuka Hironori. Prior to learning karate from Funakoshi, Otsuka was already an exponent of jujutsu (柔術). He would later depart from Funakoshi's Shotokan style and form his own style called, "Wado-ryu (和道流)," literally translated as "Harmony way style." Otsuka had a

deep concern for human welfare and sought to teach the harmonious principle of heaven-earth-man through karate-do training.

“Have no regard for martial aspects (when training) but rather adhere to the way of peace (harmony and tranquility).” Otsuka’s aspiration for those who engage in any Bujutsu or Bud o .

The word, “Wa (和)” is well known in Japanese culture, meaning harmony. Anyone that has either been to Japan or experienced interacting with Japanese will attest that they are the most kind and courteous people. This in fact is as a result of instilling “Wa (和)” concept into the social culture of Japan. Whether in daily life or in business, conformity, unity with others, and peaceful union in society is encouraged. Regardless if you disagree with someone, harmony must be maintained.

Maintaining harmony resides within the Japanese cultural concept of honne (本音) and tatemae (建前) meaning true intention and building a front, respectively. Rather than telling the true intention at times, it is better to tell a little ‘white lies’ in public to avoid conflict. Westerner may view it as hypocrisy, but it is more of a way to maintain harmony in society. Western businesspeople not familiar with the Japanese culture are flummoxed when dealing with their Japanese counterparts. For example, when the Japanese counterpart says, “yes” to a proposed idea does not necessarily mean they agree. In the concept of honne (本音) and tatemae (建前), the Japanese counterpart may not be in total agreement with the proposal, but rather than insult the Western businessperson, he is simply agreeing to review the proposal.

Foreigners may perceive the concept of honne (本音) and tatemae (建前) as being someone who is two-faced or simply being dishonest. In reality it is a concept that all cultures apply from time to time, especially in the modern age of being politically correct. As an example, If a friend who has been attempting to lose weight for the past few months and shows little progress ask, “Do I still look fat?” the tatemae (建前) response would be, “No, you look great!” To respond otherwise would be a disappointment and potentially destroy the person’s motivation to continue their quest. The difference in Japanese culture applying honne (本音) and tatemae (建前) is to maintain harmony within society, not just for an individual.

Another form of martial arts well known for its philosophical values and maintaining the concept of harmony is Shorinji Kempo (少林寺拳法), Japanese pronunciation of Shaolin Chuan Fa (少林 拳法), literal translation is Shaolin Temple Fist Law (Fist Law implies martial art). Founded by So Doshin, who was a Japanese soldier assigned as an intelligence officer in China, learned martial principles from the Shaolin masters during World War II. Profoundly influenced by the philosophical teachings of the Shaolin Buddhism ideals, he made it his mission to revive Japan from the ravages of the war. The cornerstone of So Doshin's teaching was to revitalize the Japanese society from the postwar with morality and compassion for others through martial arts training. Shorinji Kempo (少林寺拳法) taught the religious ideals of Buddhism, philosophical principles of life, and the technical aspects of Shaolin Chuan Fa (少林 拳法) combined with the principles of Japanese budo (武道) .

Our daily lives are occupied with trying to coexist with one another. People get married to stay in harmony with each other, but in reality, the quixotic state does not exist in real life for the majority. At some point in a couple's married life disagreements and argument will ensue. Marriage is often said to be about making compromises with your spouse, which is in concert with the give and take coexistence of the yin/yang. In this way, harmony is preserved within the relationship. The same is true in work environment amongst co-workers. Harmonious working relationship between different departments or co-workers achieves greater results than working independently or opposing each other.

Fighting Fire with Water

“Fight fire with fire” is a common expression heard when suggestion is made to resolve a confrontation. As human beings we have heightened emotions, which sometimes dictate our response to physical or verbal abuse. Like an animal that protects its captured prey for food will naturally respond to an intruding animal by attacking. What differentiates humans from animals is the level of intelligence that the human can develop to control emotions and other factors.

But the outcome of ‘fighting fire with fire’ is one of detrimental results for both sides. Metaphorically the best way to extinguish a fire is by applying water. Therefore, why would anyone want to fight fire with more fire? It is because of the immediate emotional response, which gives the responder a false sense of control over the other person. But such emotional responses have the potential to fuel more animosity towards the recipient. If someone yells in anger, it is human nature to immediately respond by yelling back. The other possible outcome is the recipient capitulates but with heavy resentment. No amicable resolution can be realized through such action, just as there are no winners in an argument. The ability to remain calm and “fight fire with water” requires a stable emotion, which demands more courage than instinctual response. Emotional stability is a major part of the karate-ka’s training to learn how to fight without fighting in real life.

A pugilist version of ‘fighting fire with fire’ would be going toe-to-toe with your opponent. Seemingly two boxers of equal weight class in combat with neither one backing down and trading blows until eventually one comes out victorious. Muhammad Ali, the best heavy weight boxer, not only in terms of wins and losses, but as a keen strategist, understood the value of evading, and shifting in and out of his opponent instead of engaging in toe-to-toe exchanges. Ali’s infamous quote, “float like a butterfly, sting like a bee,” is to suggest such a strategy of elusiveness.

Such physical strategies in fighting are easily imaginable and applied. However, during verbal confrontation, majority do not consider any form of strategy in resolving conflict. The importance of understanding verbal strategy is how police hostage negotiators are able to defuse potentially violent situations in a peaceful resolve with 85 to 90 percent success rate. While such negotiators are highly trained in their craft, someone without training may successfully resolve verbal confrontation by involving the thought process that redirects or approaches a potential confrontation from a different angle. Often parents do this with their children in order to avoid disappointment or simply to appease their tantrum by offering affection, dessert, or other alternative proposal.

Verbal methods of resolving conflict can be more challenging than physical confrontation. It can often result in arguments and frustration.

The heightened emotions can lead to physical altercation. Often such frustrations are alleviated through some form of physical workout, meditation or other forms of diversions.

The value of training in karate-do is recognizing that the process of learning to maintain emotional stability during physical encounters is highly relevant to developing the ability to remain calm during verbal confrontations in everyday life. Learning to defeat the opponent through anger or hostility is only a temporary victory. The wisdom of learning to fight fire with water, and the art of fighting without fighting is the ultimate victory for all parties.

Competition at its Best

“This sport development is, of course, welcome, but training merely to win a match can lead to the deterioration of this dynamic and powerful art. The need to build true proficiency on a solid foundation, I feel, is more important than ever. I believe that karate-do should be viewed from a broad viewpoint. From the aspect of its development as a modern discipline, and from the aspect of physical education also, the ultimate goal of karate-do should be the attainment of a wholesomely developed moral character built through hard and diligent training.” Nakayama Masatoshi Sensei

Competition is what has made America one of the greatest nations in the world. Without competition against the Soviet Union, the United States would not have been first to land a man on the moon. Competition is also what drives capitalism to boost the economy. Without competition, there is less incentive for companies to strive for improvement of their product and/or processes. Athletes in various sports excel as a result of competing with other outstanding athletes, thus raising the bar of the sport itself. This is competition at its best.

Even in the world of karate, the result of karate-ka competing at a high level has produced some of the best technicians in the art. During its early inception, karate competition was more of a spectator event, where only the top black belt athletes showcased their talent to large audiences. The number of participants were few, and the level of competition was high. But as karate competition became more inclusive, allowing lower rank participation, the number of spectators declined, and karate tournaments became more of a participant event. As karate practitioners of all ages and level participated in tournaments, the sports aspect of competition started to overshadow the art value of karate.

Unlike sports, karate-do competition was not originally intended to produce winners and losers. Philosophically, the intention of karate-ka to engage with one another is to test each other's skill. The term, “shi-ai” (試合) was used, literally meaning coming together to test each other. As a samurai uses his skills to slay an opponent in battle, the outcome is more about learning from the opponent and thus improving one's own skill for the next match. In this regard, the honor is bestowed

upon the opponent who sacrificed his life for the purpose of learning. In this manner, karate-do shi-ai (試合) was intended as a training ground to test and learn from each other. The ultimate goal was not the declaration of a winner or loser, but the development of the individual's skills and character.

When the concept of shi-ai (試合) and budo (武道) aspect of martial arts are forlorn for the sake of medals or trophies, it diminishes the value of the art. Judo is a prime example of a once proud martial arts of Japan that lost its budo (武道) value once it became an Olympic event, the apex of all sports competition. As a method of self-defense, judo-ka demonstrated the ability to throw opponents much larger than themselves using maximum effectiveness with efficient use of the body. But as a sport, this aspect of the art is lost when competitors are segregated by weight division for the sake of parity, and penalty points could potentially declare a winner in a match. Modern judo, not to be confused with Brazilian Jujutsu related to Mixed Martial Arts (MMA), where many of the rules are not similar, today is associated with sports rather than an art of self-defense. In retrospect, even the Founder of Judo, and initiator of judo competition, Professor Kano, concedes sports competition has led judo towards a different course than originally intended.

“Contests are to be conducted according to the highest standard of moral behavior; a contest should be a learning experience that improves your character, not an occasion for building your ego.”

Kano Jigoro, Founder of Judo

The impending introduction of karate into the Olympics may be a harbinger of another martial art facing the same outcome as judo. The Olympic stage demands a large spectator attraction, which may not exist if the competitive event is deemed boring for the audience, such as individual kata performance. Without fully comprehending the purpose of kata, the audiences will only view the performance as an unrealistic fight against an imaginary opponent. Even in present day tournaments, competitors are altering kata movements with “flashy” execution to both lure the excitement from the audience and influence the judges for higher scores. The *kiai* (気合) is executed more as a scream to attract attention rather than harnessing one's energy. In team kata, the bunkai (分解) or application section of the event is intended to demonstrate

the realistic meaning behind the techniques. But sometimes the bunkai (分解) is executed with nonsensical acrobatic actions more for entertainment than proper demonstration of realistic application. Even in kumite, some organization rules dictate kicks to the head are permissible, but disallow hand techniques to the face, seemingly to make it more challenging for athletes. But the underlying reason may be more to sensationalize the action of high kicks for spectators. Such alteration of the art for the justification of sports competition is in total contradiction to the budo (武道) aspect of karate-do and brings about an inevitable demise of the art.

Sports competition also reveals some disconcerting behavior in some competitors. The desire to win precipitates any other sense of virtue that may be taught in the philosophical aspects of the art. Competitors do not like to lose, and when things do not work in their favor, the reason for losing falls on others. For example, competitors often blame judges for failing to award a point in kumite, or faults bad judges as the reason for receiving lower scores in a kata performance. Coaches also protest and fault others, if the outcome is not in favor of their athlete for whatever reason.

It is always easier to blame others than to take responsibility for one's own actions. This occurs even in school, where the student or even the parent blames the teacher if the child does not comprehend a homework assignment or receives a poor grade. Violent behaviors have ensued between parents, coaches, and umpires at Little League games, all for the sake of challenging a bad call or play. Soccer games in Brazil have even resulted in officials being stabbed by spectators for making seemingly bad calls during the game.

Interestingly, winners never complain about bad judges or make excuses as to why they won. But even though winners and champions may not complain about officiating, winning sometimes brings out the most egregious behavior in a person or team. Being labeled the best or top ranked athlete can produce an attitude of arrogance. Athletes become more demanding; hero syndrome of wanting to take the last shot, desire for more money, more playing time, taunting the opposing team or athletes, etc.

Karate competition is not immune to this form of prima-donna behavior. Kata champions may start to believe they have mastered the

form based on the accolades received at national and international tournaments. Mastery in a sense that the champion kata athlete is no longer receptive to suggestions from sensei or sempai for improvement or unwilling to change since their actions on the court has been vindicated by judges. They begin to believe in the modified kata for points as the true kata.

True mastery of a kata is not defined by display of athleticism on the part of the karate-ka or the number of points awarded by the judges. Mastery is being able to execute the details within the kata without flaw like the Chado (茶道) master in the presence of the samurai such that each movement is performed without leaving an opening for an opponent to attack. Mastery is taking something complex and executing it with simplicity such that during the performance of the kata, the karate-ka moves in a Zen state where the karate-ka becomes part of the kata.

Kumite champions may start to believe their skills in the ring makes them good fighters in actual street fights. The reality is karate competition is confined by rules which prohibits certain seemingly dangerous techniques and targets to be executed in a match. But in actual combat there are no rules or judges to stop a match, and victory is not determined by winning a point. There is not setup in a real fight – attacks are often initiated by surprise, and anything goes. The false sense of bravado on the part of a kumite champion in believing competitive sparring is equivalent to a real fight only fuels the undesired hubris behavior in a karate-ka.

These are some of the negative side effects of competition. However, it must be noted that competition in general should be viewed as a positive for the human soul. Competition drives the individual to train harder and excel at a level greater than they could ever have achieved otherwise. Without such aspiration progress is slow and possibly little improvement over the long haul. The very desire to succeed in life is to compete. Without such desires and challenges, the human spirit is stifled or lost. Communist ideal of equality amongst the workforce essentially stifled the ambitions of the labor force to excel.

But the human desire to compete in any discipline must be tempered by sound moral values and judgement. And for karate-do competition the delineation must be discernable regarding competing purely for sports

versus testing oneself through competition for the budo (武道) aspect.

Concept Behind Karate-do Competition

Karate-do competition events were originally not conceived as sports, although rules had to be established as a way to govern the outcome of the competition. The intent here is not to explain the rules, since it varies with each organization, but more to enlighten the reader as to the original concept for competition and how it relates to karate-do training.

One of the oldest karate organizations, Japan Karate Association (JKA), was established in 1949 under the guidance of Funakoshi Gichin, and some of most senior students, Obata Isao, Nakayama Masatoshi, and Nishiyama Hidetaka. Funakoshi was never a proponent for competition, especially in regard to kumite, deemed to be dangerous and not in line with the budo (武道) ideals of learning karate for self-defense and improving the individual's character. However, many of the senior members of the JKA, Nakayama, Nishiyama, and Okazaki, forged ahead and formulated rules to guide competition along the lines of traditional budo (武道) . The first official All Japan Karate-do competition was not held until after Funakoshi's death in 1957.

In keeping with Funakoshi's ideal of karate training, "perfection of character," karate competition itself was to instill a better person through the idea of shi-ai. The idea was to showcase some of the best karate-ka matching their skills against each other in a competitive forum. Tournament competition was viewed as an extension of dojo training as a way of evaluating one's technical skills against others. It also extends the proper etiquette and courtesy towards other karate-ka and sensei in an environment outside the dojo. Win or lose, the karate-ka takes with them the understanding of learning from the experience and humbling oneself to the opponent for the opportunity. These are the budo (武道) concepts of shi-ai(試合) that forge the karate-ka as a competitor into a person of integrity.

Karate-do competition initially consisted of only kata and kumite from which other similar events were spawned such as, team kata, team kumite, and embu(演武) . The basis of karate-do training is kata, since they were the encoded teaching methods that were handed down from the ancient masters. Kata competition, while mostly based on the individual's performance of the sequence of techniques, is judged based on how well the performer has mastered the details of movements and

the execution of the techniques. As each kata has a certain ebb and flow, the karate-ka must perform the movements with rhythm and tempo as if he or she was applying the techniques against opponents from various direction. Some parts of the kata are performed slow, some are quick, and other parts are powerful. The intent of each movement is expressed by the state of *zanshin* (残心) throughout the performance of the kata.

Kumite competition is based on the concept of “*ikken hisatsu*,” (一撃必殺) meaning “one strike, one kill.” Adopted from kendo (剣道) with the mindset of using a samurai sword, the intention of a strike is to finish the opponent with a single blow. “*Ikken hisatsu*” (一撃必殺) concept should not be foreign to Western sports. When bowling the aim is to get a strike with one row of the ball. Strategies aside, in baseball the goal is to get a home run when at bat, and a serve in tennis is so the opposition will not be able to return the ball. This philosophical ideal is sometimes taken literally by some karate-ka to mean they actually have the potential to kill with one blow. While the possibility of achieving such a feat may exist, the odds are highly unlikely with the use of bare hands and feet. But the intention of “*ikken hisatsu*” (一撃必殺) for the karate-ka stems from kata, where the potential exists for multiple attacks from different directions. Thus, the elimination of each opponent must be swift and accomplished by applying a single blow. The concept of “*ikken hisatsu*” (一撃必殺) is extended to mean, “finishing blow technique,” or “*todo-me waza* (止め技) .” In this context, during kumite competition, the karate-ka’s “*todo-me waza* (止め技) must be executed with the four elements in place: proper technique, delivered to proper target, good timing, and proper distance. Technique must be delivered with sufficient power to the proper target, mainly face or midsection area, and executed when the opponent is vulnerable (timing). Since karate-do kumite competition at its inception did not use protective equipment, the techniques must be delivered without causing serious harm to the opponent, which meant they were to be controlled to within two centimeters from the target and not to penetrate beyond the epidermis level. There is no weight division among the competitors since the

concept of budo (武道) and the very nature of self-defense is not predicated on parity.

Team kata and team kumite were introduced later when the expansion of competition included regions, states, and countries competing against each other. Team kata consisted of 3 members performing the same kata in synchronized execution of the techniques. Team kumite involved 3 to 5 members competing in the same format as individual kumite, with the accumulated points determining the winner.

Embu(演武) is a choreographed pre-arranged sparring between two member athletes. The concept of embu (演武) training dates back to the method used in Shaolin kung fu(少林功夫) . The fighting sequences are choreographed such that each member knows where the next attack will be and what counter measure is to be taken. This form of training was lost during the period of Chinese Communist reign, but re-instituted after the Cultural Revolution as Chinese Wu Shu (martial art), propagandizing restoration of culture and health in China. In Wu Shu, the two-person training included the use of various weapons such as swords and spears.

Embu (演武) training is rarely used by the majority of traditional karate-do systems. The main proponent incorporating embu (演武) into their training today is Shorinji Kempo (少林寺拳法) . Nishiyama Hidetaka Sensei revived embu (演武) training for the International Traditional Karate Federation in the late 1980s, as a way to re-institute the budo (武道) elements of engagement. Unlike regular kumite, where the elements of free sparring for sports exists, embu (演武) demonstrates the true essence of the samurai's intentions of "ikken hisatsu (一撃必殺) ." Every strike, punch, or kick is treated as a potential "todo-me waza (止め技) ." While the karate-ka may not be able to kill with one blow, the philosophical intention of "ikken hitatsu (一撃必殺)" is to give it "your best effort" with each technique.

Karate-ka who have labeled embu (演武) as "fake kumite" fail to comprehend the budo (武道) aspect of karate-do training. The basis of karate-do training emanated from kata. The original intent of kata training was two-person sparring. But as karate training was shrouded

in secrecy, kata training became more of an individual's training method.

The budo (武道) aspect of competition is about continuing to learn and improve rather than thinking about winning or losing. But in any competitive arena, there will always be a declaration of first, second, and third place winners with the majority of competitors in the no-win column. In the sports world, athletes are reminded to observe good sportsmanship in victory or defeat. In the world of karate-do competition, discipline must be maintained such that the budo (武道) aspect is observed amongst each other. Most would view the outcome of competition to be purely about matching the superior skills amongst the athletes. But the physical skills are just one aspect of competition. In terms of budo (武道) , the true measure of winners and losers is their behavior after competition. Does the winner boast of their temporary reward, or remain humble and gracious for the opportunity to learn from a worthy opponent? Those who have lost, do they make excuses or blame others for the undesired outcome, or learn from defeat to strive for improvement and perhaps become a winner someday? Ultimately the measure of defeat or victory lies within yourself. While competition provides the arena for testing one's skill against another, the skill to defeat another opponent does not define one's true character, but the ability to conduct oneself properly after victory or defeat defines a person with true understanding of the budo (武道) spirit.

Losing is never a good feeling and no one wants to lose. The unpleasant feeling is compounded when the competitor compares the result of his or her performance to another competitor. An individual's performance should only be compared to oneself. In this way the individual's incremental improvement becomes a win. With only the top three being recognized as winners in most competitive events, it can be disheartening for others to feel as if they have lost. But the measurement of one's own performance with incremental progress gives confidence that the goal of perhaps making it to the top three is achievable. The main purpose for competing is to measure one's own progress – not about trying to beat another competitor. If progress is made from the last time, it becomes a win regardless of winning any medals or trophies.

The legendary basketball head coach, John Wooden, who coached at the University of California, Los Angeles, for 12 years managed to win 10 national championships. His success was based on his principle of focusing on his own team's ability rather than worrying about matchup with the opponent. He was also a proponent of working on fundamentals, conditioning, and the skills of his own team.

“When you improve a little each day, eventually big things occur.” John Wooden

One of John Wooden's players who went on to become an NBA star player wrote the following about the legendary coach:

“Coach Wooden never talked about winning and losing, but rather about the effort to win. He rarely talked about basketball, but generally about life. He never talked about strategy, statistics or plays, but rather about people and character. Coach Wooden never tired of telling us that once you become a good person, then you have a chance of becoming a good basketball player.” Bill Walton

In many respects the moral character to be developed through karate-do competition is necessary for how we conduct ourselves in daily life, since the competitive fervor is not restricted only to the sports world. In school, non-sports related competition such as, spelling B, scholastic projects, and other intellectual challenges are prevalent. Competition also exists at a larger scale when attempting to gain acceptance into a major university. In the work environment there is competition for position, contractual bids, or projects among employees. Even social gathering amongst friends engaging in casual competition of games or other skills. When competing in any arena, it is important to compete with fairness and integrity. Unethical means to gain advantage such as, cheating, doping, bribery, etc. is against all moral principles.

It is never easy not winning, especially in today's competitive world. The difference between sports competition and budo (武道) competition is the former focuses on winning while the latter is focused on not losing. Not losing to a warrior going into battle meant, ready to die. Of course, modern day competition is not about dying, but the ideal of doing one's best without thinking about winning. A warrior

does not care about achievements, nor does a soldier in war think about becoming a hero. The focus is on doing the best they can without hesitation or fear.

“You were so determined to win while I was determined not to lose.” Matsumura Sokon, Bushi

In the industrial world, the famous inventor, Thomas Edison also sums up the idea of not losing when asked by a New York Times reporter about how many times he failed in developing the light bulb. Thomas Edison’s infamous response was, ***“I have not failed. I’ve just found 10,000 ways that won’t work.”*** When one does not focus on failure, one cannot lose.

Competition is at its best when the human envelope is pushed to the maximum, and win or lose, the budo (武道) aspect is observed so that the best human character is developed. Glorification of a win is but a fleeting moment. A sound character of a person is built on one who has experienced losses and finds a way to overcome them.

“Failure is the key to success; each mistake teaches us something.” Ueshiba Morihei, Founder of Aikido

空

Lost Art of Kara

“As a mirror’s polished surface reflects whatever stands before it and a quiet valley carries even small sounds, so must the student of karate-do render his mind empty of selfishness and wickedness in an effort to react appropriately toward anything he might encounter. This is the meaning of kara, or empty, of “karate-do.” Funakoshi Gichin, Founder of Modern Karate-do

To pay homage to the origin of the art, Okinawan karate masters of the past referred to kara-te as China-hand where the kanji character for kara (空) is represented by the ideogram for Tang(唐) . Tang was used in reference to the Tang dynasty, which was the implied name for China.

Historical note: China is referred to by many names, including Zhong Guo (中國), meaning Center Country, Zhong Hua (中華), meaning Center Beauty, Cathay, or by the dynasties, Han or Tang. The use of Tang dynasty (618 AD – 907 AD) has no relations to the timeline of when karate originated. An appropriate timeline for karate development would have been around the Ming dynasty (1368 AD – 1644 AD) or Qing dynasty (1644 AD – 1912 AD). But neither Ming nor Qing was used to refer to China as the significance of using the name Tang was influenced by Southern Chinese. Tang, the period considered as, “The Golden Age of China” where prosperity and many achievements were made, became synonymous with China. Okinawa, with close proximity to Southern China, adopted the use of the name Tang in reference to China.

Kara-te is also known by the name To-de, with the Japanese synonym for Tang or kara being To. To-de is also pronounced as To-di or To-ti. The “kara” kanji for Tang was changed sometime during the early 20th century to the Japanese homonym “kara” for “empty” to reflect the philosophical ideals of the martial art. Many karate historical books document that Funakoshi Gichin changed the “kara” from “China” to “empty.” Then there are other accounts that Hanashiro Chomo, one of Itosu “Ankoh” Yasutsune’s senior students, originally coined the “empty” character long before Funakoshi. Itosu is credited with having taught many of the notable Okinawan karate masters,

including Hanashiro and Funakoshi. Who initiated the change first may not be known for certain, but the importance is the profound meaning behind “kara” for empty.

The second character in kara-te, “*te*” is literally translated as hand. Combined with the first character “kara” for empty, the meaning of “empty hand” is sometimes misunderstood to mean no weapon is used in training or the implication of keeping one’s hand open. The fact that many modern karate-do training does not integrate the use of weapons, especially within the Shotokan style, is not the reason for the meaning of empty hand. In fact, Funakoshi practiced with many of the kobudo (古武道) weapons, such as the bo, sai, and tonfa, but his teaching of karate-do did not include any of these weapons. This misinterpretation of no-weapon may stem from the literal interpretation of “*te*” as hand. “*Te*” (sometimes pronounced “*ti*” in Okinawa) is an abbreviation of “bushi no te (武士の手),” meaning “warrior’s hand,” implying martial art being practiced by warriors. Depending on the region or area within Okinawa, there are different versions of “bushi no te (武士の手)” being practiced based on learning from different Chinese Chuan Fa (拳法) masters. To differentiate between the different versions of “bushi no te (武士の手),” they were simply referred to by the area name followed by “*te*,” e.g. Shuri-te, Naha-te, and Tomari-te, named after the towns of Shuri, Naha, and Tomari, respectively. With collaboration in training amongst the regions, bushi no te (武士の手) was further simplified and referred to simply as “*te*.” Thus, the use of “*te*” becomes synonymous with practicing martial art. Karate became the naming convention for “martial arts using emptiness.”

Te reference to martial arts is similar in a way to kung fu (功夫). When the word kung fu (功夫) is mentioned, it is immediately associated with martial arts. In actuality, the word itself has no reference to martial arts per se, – kung fu (功夫) simply means skill or accomplished ability through hard work. In the context of normal speech in the Chinese language, someone could compliment another person’s skill in other endeavor, such as cooking, by saying, “Your cooking is kung fu (功夫).”

The meaning of emptiness has multitude of implication for the karate-ka. The primary reference of empty is clearing of the mind or having an open mind. At the onset of training, the student must approach each class session with “kara” in mind. Like a sponge ready to absorb all, the student must be ready to receive all that is being taught in the dojo without any pre-conceived ideas. Traditionally karate-do students would never ask questions of the instructor during class session, which instills upon them to just “do it” and keep the mind void of any fore-thought. Culturally this is feasible in Japan, but the Western culture is one of curiosity, and inquisitiveness is impressed upon them. In general, inquisitiveness should not be faulted on any culture since this only prompts the student and instructor to seek answers as they progress through the advance stages of training. But when curiosity becomes a display of hubris behavior is when the student possesses a non-empty mind. The following Zen parable illustrates the importance of learning to “empty your mind” before attempting to learn from someone.

A learned man felt unsatisfied with his current sensei’s teaching, so he sought to learn more from a famous Zen master.

The learned man asked the Zen master, “I have nothing more to learn from my sensei, can you teach me so that I can become wiser?”

The Zen master obligingly agreed and began to explain about his teachings. As the learned man heard the Zen master describe each of the teachings, he repeatedly interrupted him with remarks such as, “Oh, yes, I’ve already learned that” or “I’ve mastered that as well.”

The Zen master realizing that the learned man was more interested in impressing him with his knowledge rather than learning, suggested to pause to have some tea. As the Zen master continued to talk, he poured tea into the cup for the learned man. Even after the tea overflowed the cup, the Zen master continued pouring.

The learned man was flummoxed by the actions of the Zen master. Is he blind? Can he not see the cup is full?

“Enough,” shouted the learned man. “The cup is overflowing; no more can go in!” he exclaimed.

“Indeed,” said the Zen master. “Just like the cup, your mind and heart are already filled with your own opinions and knowledge. If you do not first empty your cup, how can you taste my cup of tea?”

Keeping an open mind is often challenging for those who already possess knowledge from either different sensei's teaching or another system. As one accumulates knowledge from a particular style, one must refrain from being biased towards only one method or system. As in the story of the three blind men attempting to describe an elephant (Chapter on Beauty of the Art), if the elephant is only perceived from one vantage point, all the other beauty of the elephant will never be understood. No matter how knowledgeable a person becomes, there is always something to be learned by keeping the cup at least half empty. While it is difficult to keep one's cup completely empty as one becomes ingrained into a particular style or system, "kara" is about expanding the half empty cup, whereby, through experience one can retain what is useful and shed what is unnecessary. Wisdom can only be achieved by keeping an open mind.

***"The mind that opens to new idea never returns to its original size."* Albert Einstein**

***"The usefulness of the cup is in its emptiness."* Bruce Lee**

In combat, this mental state of "kara" is typically expressed in Japanese budo (武道) as, "mu-shin (無心)," meaning "nothing-mind," or "no-mind." "Mu-shin (無心)" is the shorten version of the Zen expression, "mu-shin no shin (無心の心)," meaning, "mind without mind." It is not a state of a blank mind, resembling a state of bewilderment, but a mind that is not pre-occupied with any preconceived thoughts of how to respond to an attack, as an example. Response time is crucial, of course, in any kumite and self-defense situations. But the type of response in combat requires voluntary muscles to respond in the same manner as the involuntary muscles. Involuntary muscle response occurs without any delay in the brain, as information processing occurs instantaneously and relies heavily on instinct. If a foreign object comes towards the eyes, the eye lids instinctively close without hesitation or thought process. Voluntary muscle response requires brain processing of information that slows down reaction time. By the time the information is received, processed, and response is formulated, the attack has already landed. Even in a pre-arranged sparring scenario (typical in karate-do training known as one-step sparring), where the attack and target are already dictated to the

partner, the actions are mentally processed even by veteran students. This form of training is continuously conducted so as the student advances, the response flows with the opponent's action, and without forethought the block and counterattacks are performed with "no-mind." Advancing towards free-sparring, karate-ka then learns how to become one with the opponent instead of thinking about or anticipating the opponent's actions. Continuous training enables the martial artist to develop such muscle memory, improve reaction time, increase awareness, and eventually reach the mental state of "mu-shin (無心) ."

This state of "mu-shin (無心)" is also to be experienced while performing kata to allow the execution of the movements to become flawless and fluid, instead of thinking through each action. Kata is commonly referred to as form, which in of itself is emptiness and emptiness becomes form. For many karate-ka, kata training is merely form practice to either perfect techniques or learn application of the movements. While these elements of kata are important, majority of karate-ka rarely perform kata with "no-mind." With the ebb and flow of quick, strong, and slow parts to a kata, the karate-ka's mind can easily become occupied with how slow or fast or strong to make the next action. Without a physical opponent present while performing the kata, achieving the state of "mu-shin (無心)" becomes even more challenging than training in kumite. The necessity to obtain this level is demonstrating the mastery of one's physical skills while maintaining mental calmness – moving Zen.

Kara is also about understanding how to maintain emptiness in the heart – untainted like a new- born baby. Human traits such as envy, hatred, ego, etc. brings out the negative side of one's character. As the wearing of a white do-gi (道着) reminds the practitioner the representation of symbolic white for purity. This is not to suggest wearing black or any other color do-gi (道着) by other systems of karate does not constitute being pure of heart. Certainly, each system has their own reasons for wearing different color do-gi(道着) , but for traditional karate-do practitioners, there is only white for that reason. But more important than the attire is the training in karate-do to maintain purity of heart. Sparring in the dojo requires intensity with heightened emotion which demands control of the physical actions. Any

thought of anger or frustration can become a detriment not only to the partner but also to oneself. Defeat is certain for those who fight in anger.

“The best fighter is never angry.” Lao Tzu

Purity of the heart also means not becoming arrogant. As karate engenders confidence in the student, and with increased ability, the practitioner can easily become a braggadocio, if the purity of heart is not kept. Confidence is a good quality to obtain in any endeavor. But over confidence can potentially lead to arrogance, which can have negative results, as in underestimating an opponent. There are many instances in sports where an underdog team is overlooked by the superior opponent and the outcome is defeat for the superiorly skilled team. While over confidence and arrogance may seem to mean the same, an overconfident person is able to overcome challenges with optimism, as opposed to an arrogant person who tends to display immaturity and hostility. An arrogant person seeks approval of their accomplishments, which in most cases is disdained by the other. “Kara” for the purity of the heart is to remind the karate-ka to refrain from becoming arrogant.

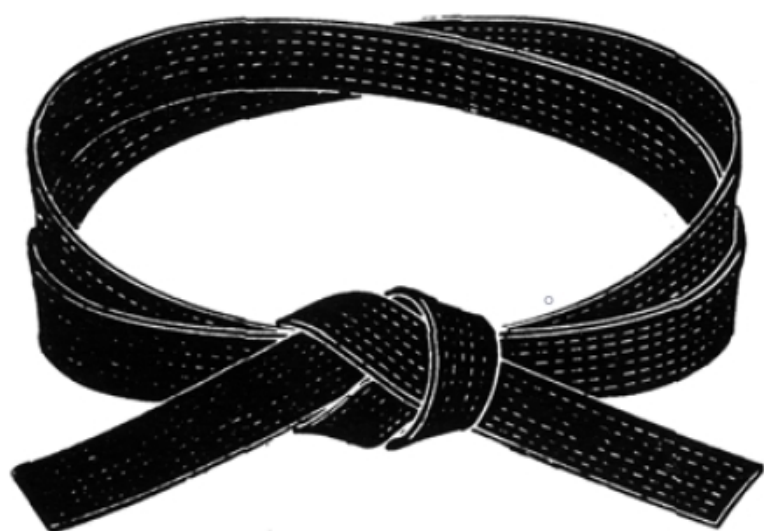
Part of the responsibility of the sensei and sempai is to instill upon the kohai the importance of “kara,” for purity of heart. Unfortunately, some contemporary karate-do instructors are not exactly paragon for demonstrating the profound meaning of “kara.” The vitriolic behavior of some senior karate-do instructors has caused organizations to split. It would seem karate-do has lost the art of “kara” with such behaviors. Dissension amongst the high ranks is not just within the modern era of karate-do, although the preponderance of such behavior seems more prevalent today than in the past. Even within Funakoshi’s Shotokan system, a split occurred resulting in two different factions: Shotokai and Japan Karate Association (JKA) Shotokan. Since then, numerous organizations have been formed, only to be subdivided yet again, and again. Seemingly the consequence of forming a large organization is to have dissension within the ranks. But this is truly against the ideal of understanding “kara” for training unselfishly, egoless, and pure of heart. How and why such behavior occurs is beyond the scope of this book. The intent here is to merely point out that even high ranking karate-ka are fallible to human frailty. The sincerest practice of “kara”

should be within each individual karate-ka, such that organizations becomes a means for aligning the continual education and training towards proper understanding of karate-do.

The continual divide of organizations only serves testimonial to the difficulty in applying “kara” off the dojo floor and in daily life.

Arguments between two people are usually because of two opposing viewpoints. Typically, there are no winners in an argument, only a compromise is reached after one side capitulates, with both sides mostly remaining disgruntled. If one side had applied the idea of “kara” and remained a good listener, a compromise could have been reached after listening and processing the information. But the challenge is refraining from expressing one’s own viewpoint without first understanding the opposing view. Certainly, both sides could have valid good and bad points, but to impose only one side and unwilling to be open-minded creates further discontent.

The simple change of one character from Tang to empty redefined the meaning of karate to something more than just a method of self-defense. But if the implication of the profound meaning for “kara” is not practiced, the art will be lost among the proponents that only interpret karate as “empty hand” fighting. The ideal of understanding “kara” takes time to nurture into the minds of the practitioner. The physical element is easier to achieve than the shaping of an individual’s behavior. The sincere practice of karate-do is to achieve emptiness of heart and mind.



Rank Inflation

***“You don’t need a black belt to prove you are good in Karate.”
Miyagi Chogun, Founder of Goju-ryu***

The concept of “kyu,” or student level, and “dan,” or degree level belt ranking did not exist at the birth of karate-do in Okinawa. In fact, karate-do training in Okinawa was not conducted by wearing a do-gi (道着), but by using any casual loose clothing. Karate-do belt ranking system and the do-gi (道着) that is well recognized today was adopted by Funakoshi Gichin from Professor Jigoro Kano, the Founder of Judo. Funakoshi’s initial demonstration of karate in Japan drew the interest of many prominent martial artists including Kano. Their eventual sharing of ideas between the two martial arts lead to Funakoshi adopting Kano’s use of a do-gi (道着) and the belt ranking system.

Kano’s ranking scheme entailed 8 kyu steps before reaching the first “dan” or black belt level. In its early inception of the belt color at the kyu level, only white and brown were used. As the karate-ka advances, the kyu number decreases starting at 8th kyu and eventually ending at 1st kyu. The brown belt is worn typically starting at 3rd kyu to 1st kyu. The metaphoric representation of transitioning from white belt to black is to symbolize the amount of time and effort required to become adept at mastering the basics of the art. Throughout the course of training, the belt is never to be washed, and after years of accumulating sweat and wear, what was once a white colored belt is soiled to the point of becoming a dark color. In reality, the actual belt would become frail and stained but never turning into the color black. The significance of using brown belt is to symbolize the close transition from white to black belt.

After reaching the highest belt color level, black, progress for the next phase is measured by degrees or “dan.” In this way the continuous learning of the art does not end after reaching the black belt level, but rather it signifies a new beginning at the next level. One can equate this to after graduating from high school, college begins with a new level of learning at an advance phase to eventually earn a Bachelor, Master, or Doctorate degree.

Contemporary karate belts at the kyu level include a multitude of colors resembling the colors of the rainbow. The kyu ranks have also expanded to include 9th and 10th kyu for some dojo and organizations. Primarily used as a motivational tool for younger karate-ka, the belt color changes at each kyu advancement. No consistency exists between organizations or styles as to the association of kyu rank to the color belt. The green belt, as an example could be a higher kyu at one dojo while others may use green for a lower kyu level. The only consistency for the most part, is white for beginner, brown for intermediate, and black for the dan level.

Attainment of the black belt is still regarded as a major accomplishment and often characterized as becoming an expert. The stigma associated with “black belt” as being the definition of an expert carries into even the corporate world. The Six Sigma methodology for continuously improving business processes to make company operations lean by reducing defects or wasted functions, uses the terminology of black belt to signify the person has become an expert in understanding the techniques and tools of Six Sigma. The average training time required to become certified in Six Sigma black belt is between one and 3 months. Of course, no one will ever equate Six Sigma black belt as being equivalent to a person with an earnest karate black belt. But the branding of the image of a “black belt” as an expert is prevalent throughout society. Even young abacus students have “black belt” as a rank.

In the recent decades, karate’s popularity has attracted more youth than adults starting off as young as 5 years of age. One of the motivating factors essential in student retention is promotion with visible reward, which instigated the use of the various color belts at the kyu level. Eventually the young karate-ka will advance beyond the 8 kyu levels and venture into the realm of being promoted to black belt rank. While some karate organization are steadfast in not awarding a “black belt” to youth under 18 years of age, there are those that have awarded dan ranks to karate-ka as young as 8 or 9 years old. Such an achievement at such a young age prompts tabloid to laud the 8 or 9-year-old as being the youngest person to become a black belt. While the efforts by the youth to obtain such a lofty goal is admirable, the standards are not the same compared to an adult black belt, both from a

mental and physical standpoint. However, tabloid sensationalism would naively portray an 8 or 9 year-old black belt as being an expert in karate, simply because of the established laurel associated with the belt.

The belt ranking system provided a method of gauging the karate-ka's progress, as well as enabling them to establish incremental goals. Such motivation is worthwhile and a necessary stimulus in many cases for the human spirit to strive for higher development. But it also provides an avenue for many karate-ka to perceive rank as being more important than learning to craft their skill. The desire for higher and higher dan ranks for various reasons, eventually inflate the value of the rank itself.

The first indication of rank inflation occurred in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Still in its early introduction outside of Japan, attainment of shodan (first degree) or nidan (second degree) in the Japanese karate-do system was a major accomplishment. The grueling examination to earn a Shodan was a way to screen out the weak from the strong, the most skilled from the average. The vast majority failed to pass the exam on the first or second attempt. Often the repeated re-examination resulted in the examinee quitting karate all together. To advance from shodan to nidan the training became progressively more difficult and required the shodan to devote several years of training before being allowed to test for nidan. The prerequisite for advancement between each advancing dan rank required incrementally additional years of earnest training. Anyone with a sandan (third degree) rank was revered since they were considered instructor level with the ability to dissect a student's technique and make adjustments for improvement. Very few had attained the rank of godan (fifth degree), considered to be a master level. To pass godan was rare or unheard of at the time. There were even claims that some of the Japanese karate organizations made an unwritten rule of not promoting any of the masters past godan, since supposedly this was Funakoshi's highest rank. This unconfirmed story was most likely apocryphal since Funakoshi never claimed or received any "dan" rank. He did, however, administer ranks to his students – the highest being godan.

The tight rein on "dan" ranks changed for karate-do as more and more Tae Kwon Do dojang (dojo in Korean) proliferated across the country in the early 1970s. Tae Kwon Do had adopted the same belt

ranking scheme as karate-do with the use of degrees at the black belt level. The proliferation of the art was conducted by Tae Kwon Do instructors, who had already possessed ranks as high as 7th dan. The majority of the Tae Kwon Do instructors were in most cases much younger than the senior Japanese masters holding a high level of 5th dan. To even the playing field, the Japanese instructors were soon promoted to higher ranks to match the ranks of the Korean martial arts, which also included Tang Soo Do and Hwa Rang Do.

The parity in ranks was motivated by the desire to attract students to the art more so than any discontent between martial art styles. Even though the Japanese karate-do and Korean Tae Kwon Do were two different martial art systems, both had similar forms of kicks and punches. The technical execution and forms were not easily distinguishable by the layman. In an era when Bruce Lee movies ignited a huge interest by the populace to learn martial arts, marketing of the instructors' rank was equally as important as marketing the art. The public's naiveté to the martial arts seemingly viewed learning from a higher degree instructor equated to higher quality instructions.

While many of the instructors at the time were worthy of being awarded to higher ranks, the stage was set for karate-do dan ranks to exceed godan and beyond. The general guideline for eligibility of promotion from one degree to the next were established by many of the Japanese Karate-do organizations with similar requirements. Prerequisite for eligibility for promotion to the next dan level was a minimum number of years wait time between ranks. As the dan level increases the number of years between also increases, e.g. to advance from shodan to nidan is a minimum of two years, and from nidan to sandan is a minimum of 3 years, and so on. Of course, the karate-ka must be examined and pass before receiving the promotion. However, sometimes the persistence of the examinee can overcome the technical and/or knowledge competence. There is no limit as to how many times an examinee can fail the dan test. But ultimately if the examinee is persistent, promotion is granted after two or three failure attempts. From the standpoint of character development, such persistence demonstrates determination and strength of spirit. However, the negative is the production of high ranking karate-ka with less technical skills and knowledge than the lower dan ranks. This potentially fuels

the karate-ka's ego to value the high dan rank number instead of focusing on how to improve as a karate-ka.

Not all black belt ranks are awarded based on technical merits. Just as honorary degrees have been awarded to non-scholars in the academia world, karate awards honorary black belts to individuals not necessarily based on training in the dojo. Elvis Presley, as an example was awarded an honorary black belt based more on his celebrity status more so than the years of training. Even without such notoriety, a karate-ka or any individual that becomes a major contributor within an organization could receive or be promoted to an honorary dan rank. Honorary higher ranks are also bestowed upon those who are no longer able to perform due to physical limitation but have the distinction of having trained for many years. Even in the case of the persistent karate-ka who is unable to pass the next dan level exam after multiple attempts are eventually awarded as an honorary rank.

Regardless of whether the black belt or higher dan rank was obtained through honorary status or not, there is no distinction on the dojo floor once the karate-ka puts on a do-gi (道着) how the rank was awarded – a black belt is recognized as a black belt, a godan is a godan. Attainment of the black belt provides power to the individual, with which comes a sense of responsibility. If the responsibility is not exercised properly, the power obtained can become abusive. The power associated with the rank is not about physical attributes, but rather the influential power. Even honorary ranks have the power to influence lower rank karate-ka, either in a positive or negative way. Positive influence is by setting good example for others to follow and remaining humble. Negative influence is when the black belt feels a sense of entitlement with the power of authority and imposes will upon lower ranks as a means of self-promotion. The focus becomes one of demanding respect as oppose to earning the respect of others. This human character vulnerability to exercise power of authority in a negative way is seen in politics and in the corporate world.

What was once conceived as an earnest reward for achieving a major accomplishment through austere training has been tainted in the modern era of karate-do ranking, with inflated ranks and inflated ego. The desire to be recognized or profess to have a higher dan level than others is becoming more important than progressing in the art. It is

even more laughable and possibly embarrassing to see some karate instructors who wear a patch on their dogi with the title, “Sensei.” No disrespect to any instructors who wish to promote their title, but, if they truly are worthy of being an instructor, shouldn’t their actions speak for itself? The fact that they want everyone else to notice that he or she is a sensei by wearing such a patch implies they need to be recognized as such. Further recognition is sought by wearing a do-gi (道着) exclusively designed for a “sensei.” One can only wonder how sensei’s were recognized in the past without such promotions!

Augmenting the grandeur of a high rank is the need for some instructors to also be recognized and/or addressed by a title. Prevalent in non-traditional sector are titles like, Chief Instructor, Master, Grandmaster, and Supreme Grandmaster. Some traditional karate-do systems have adopted the kendo (剣道) title scheme of Renshi (錬士), Kyoshi (教士), and Hanshi (範士). Renshi (錬士) is designated as an accomplished instructor, Kyoshi(教士) is an advanced instructor, and Hanshi(範士) is at the highest advanced instructor.

Understandably some titles are honorifically given to the sensei by the students. To distinguish between the head instructor to other instructors within the dojo, students have honorifically given the title to the head sensei as shi-han (師範), meaning model instructor, usually translated as master. Aikido (合氣道) students address the Founder of Aikido, Ueshiba Moreihei as O-Sensei, meaning Great-Sensei. But such titles are not something the true sensei demands from the students.

***“Those who know do not speak. Those who speak, do not know.”
Old Chinese adage.***

Rank is an important measurement for personal progress in the art. But it should not become the standard by which karate-ka’s ability is measured nor should it be measured to others. When seeking the next higher rank becomes the main purpose for training, one must be reminded of the parable, “A Man of Tao (Do) and a Little Man.”

A student once asked the sensei, “What is the difference between a man of Tao and a little man?” The sensei responded as such, “It is quite simple. When the little man receives his shodan, he cannot wait to tell everyone he has received his first-degree black belt. When he receives

his nidan, he will climb to the rooftops and shout it out to everyone. When he receives his sandan, he will parade around town and let everyone know of his accomplishment.”

The sensei continues, “But when the man of Tao receives his shodan, he will bow his head in gratitude. Upon receiving his nidan, he will bow his head and shoulders. And when he receives his sandan, he will bow at the waist and quietly walk alongside the wall so that people will not see him or notice him.”

Nature has a way of teaching humans about how to conduct themselves in life. The bamboo tree grows tall with strong roots. The taller it grows and the older it gets the bamboo tree becomes humbler by bowing deeper.

Humility is the noblest trait to achieve in learning karate. The humblest person is a newborn child, who is untainted by any environmental influence after birth. As the child grows to adulthood, knowledge is gained, and the body becomes stronger. But as our life experience expands, we are also exposed to many undesirable human traits, such as, envy, ego, hate, anger, etc. This is the next phase for the new black belt to discern and understand the moral qualities that makes the human being as pure as possible. It requires steadfast dedication to training physically and mentally. The journey then to integrate the sound moral qualities into personal character becomes a lifetime pursuit, as daily encounters and interactions with others never cease in testing a person’s fortitude. This then becomes part of the “do” in karate-do, as a way of life.

“True karate-do is this: that in daily life, one’s mind and body be trained and developed in a spirit of humility; and that in critical times, one be devoted utterly to the cause of justice.” Funakoshi Gichin, Founder of Modern Karate-do

Control – the Ultimate Weapon

“Control your emotions or it will control you.” Chinese adage.

Any weapon by itself is no more dangerous than the user's intention. Mankind has created many weapons, from the simplest club to the most sophisticated nuclear bombs. But a club, gun, or any other weapon by itself cannot initiate harm. The impetus to strike another person with a club or a sword or pull the trigger on a gun ultimately rest on the minds of the individual who controls the decision. This holds true even for unarmed martial arts such as karate that uses only the body as a weapon. In this sense, the ultimate weapon is the individual's intent to control their action.

The mental state of an individual usually dictates the physical outcome. A calm person refrains from striking an offensive individual, while an angry person has the potential to strike the offensive person at will – such is the state of emotion that is embedded in the human DNA.

Of the myriad of human emotions, psychologists contend they can be classified into six basic ones: anger, fear, surprise, disgust, sadness, and joy. Within these six classifications, the three emotions that are of relevance in martial arts are, anger, fear, and surprise. Fear is evident when confronted with any danger or encounter. Surprise induces an entire range of fear, especially in self-defense situations. And anger is an emotion that sparks an uncontrolled response, usually in a physical action.

The ability to control the mental and emotional state becomes of primary importance in controlling whatever weapon a person may possess. But before getting into the mental aspect, it is worth exploring how the body is conditioned to work with the mind. The simple act of using a finger to pull the trigger on a gun does not require much physical training. But any level of physical proficiency demanding motor skills requires hours of training to develop what is termed, muscle memory. Muscle memory is thought of as the muscles remembering the motions that were performed repetitively to learn a motor skill. Learning to play the chords on a guitar, a ballet dancer doing the pirouette, a gymnast performing on the balance beam, or simply learning how to ride the bicycle, are motor skills that are regarded as being memorized by the muscles. But technically the

muscles have no means of remembering – only strengthening and developing muscle fibers. The memory aspect of muscle memory is through the brain. The motor cortex in the brain develops stronger connection between the neurons that represent the motion making the memory better and easier to access. In this way, the guitarist no longer needs to look at the finger's placement for chords, the ballet dancer and gymnast, etc. can perform their routines as if the muscles had memorized them. Conditioning the muscles and learning new physical skills in effect is linking with the brain.

The importance of developing muscle memory is to also respond physically by executing a learned skill set almost instantaneous without conscious thought process. Vital to this type of response, of course, is in karate and other martial arts where the basis of hand-to-hand combat is through spontaneous reaction. In any sparring condition, reacting after thinking only hinders the reaction time and certain to spell defeat. Just as a race car driver has no time to think then react to avoid a collision, a fighter cannot think then react. The split second makes all the difference whether you have the opening, or the opponent has the opening to strike.

Training to achieve muscle memory would seem like an uncontrolled reflex action, similar to the patellar reflex test conducted in the doctor's office. But karate training has always been touted as learning to control the mind and body, to the point where traditional karate-do is labeled as non-contact martial art, where the emphasis of physical control is paramount in all aspect of training, especially during kumite. Karate-ka's are taught to stop short centimeters from the partner's intended target, whether in free-sparring or pre-arranged sparring while still delivering the techniques at full speed. How then does a karate-ka with well-developed muscle memory learn to control their techniques?

The concept of controlling techniques short of contact is not new to budo(武道) . Most budo (武道) arts that use weapons such as, iaido (居合道) and kobudo (古武道) , must exercise extreme control when training with a partner for obvious reasons. As karate training initially included kobudo (古武道) weapons, such as, tonfa, sai, bo, nunchaku, etc. many of the control concepts were adopted in the

unarmed training. Controlling the weapons becomes an extension of the control of the body.

For fear of severely injuring one another, the initial idea of engaging in free-sparring or kumite in karate-do was admonished by Funakoshi. Only kata and basic pre-arranged sparring was practiced with techniques controlled short of reaching the target. But the younger generation of karate-ka of the time needed more than kata and pre-arranged sparring – they wanted validation that they could engage in free-sparring. Through experimentation by fire, kumite started from a brawl-like uncontrolled contact penetrating the epidermis and dermis, to understanding the importance of control through *kime* (決め) . *Kime* (決め) , or decisive act, is commonly translated as focus – the convergence of the body, mind, and spirit into a single action or technique. Karate techniques were executed with *kime* (決め) , but almost always against air. Executing techniques against an opponent with *kime* (決め) enabled the karate-ka to aim for higher skill level – striking at full speed and stopping just short of contact. The outcome is the transference of energy to the opponent, or shocking power through the contraction of the muscles. Analogous action is that of a car full of dummies without being restrained by seatbelts, going 40 mph then suddenly stopping a few feet from impact. When the car stops suddenly, the energy transfer causes the unprotected dummies to fly through the windshield. The dummies, in the case of karate techniques is the shock wave that is emanated towards the opponent. Common demonstration of this shock wave by karate-ka is the ability to snuff out a candle with a punch from one to two inches away.

Complementing the physical control is the mental component within the concept of *zanshin* (残心) . Adopted from Zen, *zanshin* (残心) is translated as remaining mind. More commonly, *zanshin* (残心) is referred to as the state of awareness. Zen practitioners train to reach this state through long hours of meditation. While Zen practice is mostly body in stillness, karate-ka and other budo-ka (武道家) train with the body in motion through kata and application. The awareness for the karate-ka is being vigilant throughout the execution of techniques not allowing any opening or letting one's guard down. The most vulnerable period for an opponent to attack is at the beginning or

end of a technique. Some karate-ka only realize the importance of *zanshin* (残心) at the end of a technique, as in the end of a kata.

There are slow movements within kata that are designed to emphasize not only the contraction and expansion of the muscles but also training the awareness of *zanshin* (残心) in the *kamae* (構え) , or readiness position. In this manner the mental awareness through *zanshin* (残心) controls the developed muscle memory.

Zanshin (残心) training also enables the karate-ka to focus on controlling the three emotions that concerns the martial artist, anger, fear, and surprise. All the physical training becomes less effective if the emotions are not kept in check during the heat of confrontation. When the emotions of fear and surprise stimulates the nervous system, the ability to respond is hampered by increase heart rate, blood pressure rises, and reaction time is slowed. Athletes and performers at various levels have experienced the “butterflies” or feeling of nervousness and anxiety. Learning to control such nervous energy can be used in one’s favor, if not it could impede performance. Training to control the emotional state for the karate-ka is equally as important as training the body. The ability to remain calm becomes the biggest asset in combat.

Traditional karate-do trains with this ideal in mind of controlling not only techniques when engaging in kumite but also the emotions of anger. Anger is an emotion that fuels the body to respond with heightened energy. Without control such energy can be detrimental to both the attacker and the recipient. No skill is necessary to strike another person without control. Any human being with significant amount of mass has the potential to deliver a severe blow without any type of training in martial arts. The ability to execute techniques with control requires the convergence of both mental and physical to work in concert enabling the karate-ka to remain calm.

With the affinity towards full contact and reality fighting, there is less desire these days to understand the idea behind controlling one’s technique short of the target. The effectiveness of such a training comes under scrutiny from time to time as to how efficacious karate techniques will be in real life self-defense if practitioners are taught to refrain from making contact. Proponents for contact during sparring, which includes various styles of karate, use safety equipment to minimize the danger of hurting one another severely. Practitioners take comfort in knowing

that they are protected in case they get hit. However, this false sense of security also has a psychological proponent associated with it. Psychologically, an aggressive attacker may hit the opponent harder believing the protective gear will prevent them from getting injured. But any level of contact, even with protective gears transfer energy that shocks the body. Injuries can still occur sometimes latent in a form of concussion or internal hemorrhaging if excessive contact is made. Boxers always use gloves and protective headgears during training practice, yet boxing has the most cases of concussions for combat sports.

The intent here is not to debate as to whether contact or non-contact is best for training. The choice of one over the other is based on each martial system's principles for how they believe the art should be applied. Both views certainly have merit and exercise caution in control, with or without protective equipment. For the traditional karate-ka, the art of fighting is about more than just hitting someone – it is about controlling one's mental and physical action.

“To win 100 victories in 100 battles is not the ultimate skill, but to subdue the enemy without fighting is the ultimate skill.” Sun Tzu

Acquisition of such fighting skills requires years of training. For those who have no desire to invest so much time in hand-to-hand method of self-defense will resort to a simple solution – a handgun. The common belief is that learning how to shoot a gun provides a safe haven for the user against assailants. Certainly, a bullet can stop an assailant from a distance but facing an actual dangerous scenario with another human being is completely different than shooting targets at a firing range. The ability to shoot another human being, whether to maim or kill, requires more than simply pointing and pulling the trigger. With any dangerous encounter, there is a level of anxiety, fear, and other emotional states that must be overcome. The inability to control any of these faculties can result in the victim's weapon taken away used against them. This is not to imply weaponless martial arts can defend against bullets or other lethal weapons. The effectiveness of any weapon, whether it be a sword, gun, club, or hands and feet, ultimately resides in the human being able to control one's own mental, physical, and emotional state.

The importance of control relates to exercising control of one's emotions, which is crucial in daily life. Human beings are the most intelligent species on earth, but also the most emotional creatures. The constant fight that we have is learning how to control our emotions. Confrontations heighten our emotions causing an irrational response. Emotional stability is often emphasized during kumite training in order to keep our reaction and actions in check. In the same vain, emotional control during verbal confrontation allows one to respond more rationally, rather than out of impulse. Impulsive response can have dire consequences.

“Speak when you are angry, and you will make the best speech you will ever regret.” **Ambrose Bierce, American Short Story Writer.**

Even the most passive individual (always exceptions) can reach a threshold if provoked to respond in a hostile manner. One of the most common encounters in modern society are incidents of road rage. Whether intentional or by accident, the fact that another vehicle suddenly cuts in front of you provokes hostile emotion. The fact that the driver is in control of their vehicle gives them a sense of power to retaliate or create havoc. Once removed from the vehicle, the person returns to their genteel personality.

The classic Walt Disney film, “Goofy Motor Mania,” illustrates such a behavior. The Goofy character is a mild manner individual under normal circumstances. Once Goofy sits behind the steering wheel of a car, his demeanor changes such that he gets angry easier and loses his patience with other drivers on the road. Behind the wheel he feels somewhat powerful having control of a potential weapon – the car. But Goofy does not have control of his own mental and emotional self. Goofy is a work of fiction, but it is not far removed from reality.

Exercising control of our emotion requires the true convergence of the physical, mental, and spirit of the individual.

The element of surprise in an undetermined self-defense situation that can cause an entire range of fear and anger is an emotion that sparks uncontrolled response, mostly physical. The karate-ka's ability to control such emotions gives him or her the ability to control the physical outcome. And all three emotions, surprise, fear, and anger, are dependent upon the training of the mind to control the emotional state,

and in turn controlling the body. In terms of hand-to-hand combat, the physical action must be executed without the mind first telling it what to do. Just as an unconscious reflex action, training consists of developing muscle memory such that when an attack comes, the defender strikes without hesitation. The mind becomes a state of awareness instead of controlling the body's action.

Training in any martial art is always tempered by a certain level of control, whether it is MMA, Brazilian jujutsu or other forms of contact martial arts. Some level of contact is made even when gloves or protective gears are worn but executing with full force is not emphasized in training for the obvious reasons. Otherwise, there would be a high demand for expendable training partners. But reality fighting takes comfort in making contact, no matter how minimal, with the thought that in actual self-defense the effectiveness of their action is not in question. No doubt in any combat situation, full contact must be made to defeat the opponent. But in terms of skill, none is required to strike another person without control. Any physically strong man or woman of considerable mass can generate enough force to harm another human being without having trained in any form of martial arts or pugilist art. If there is no skill to be developed, there is no need for training. Yet at each phase of any pugilist and martial artist's development, there is a beginner, intermediate, and advance level. At the beginner level, control of any technique and movements are lacking. At the intermediate level, the practitioner begins to understand how the techniques coordinate with their body. Then at the advanced stage, the practitioner learns to control the execution of the techniques. As the practitioner progresses, the ability to control one's action becomes the measure of mastery in the art. This is true even in a non-combative art such as Shudo, where the mastery of the calligraphy is demonstrated by the control of the brush stroke.

A person in control of their emotions and confident in their ability is not easily bullied. Bullied in a sense of being taunted into doing something malicious or simply provoked into a challenge. A person in control has nothing to prove to others. The following account of the famous judo-ka, Mifune Kyuzo, is a good example of a person in control.

Author's Note: Rendition of this story varies, but the content of what occurred is true as witnessed by Mifune's students. The author takes the liberty to embellish on what transpired in order to tell a more colorful story.

Mifune Kyuzo was considered the greatest exponent of judo, second only to the Founder, Kano. Slender in size, Mifune would defeat other judo-ka younger, bigger in size and strength in randori (free-style match in judo), even at the advanced age of his 70s.

During the early days of karate's prominence in Japan, an arrogant karate instructor was set out to prove to his class that karate was a better martial art than judo. He invited a well-known judo-ka, Mifune Kyuzo, to a challenge in a feat of power. The karate instructor had piled several tiles, one on top of another, and smashed it with his bare hands. After successfully breaking all the tiles with a single blow, he asked Mifune in front of all his students, "Can you do that with judo?"

Mifune's response was, "Of course! I'll be right back." After having said those words, Mifune left the dojo and walked towards his car. He retrieved a heavy metal object. Mifune then walked into the dojo and stood in front of the tile of bricks. With one stroke he smashed all the tiles with the tire iron.

Mifune remarked, "In judo we don't need to make our hands tough to break bricks. We have tools for that purpose." With that said, Mifune left the dojo.

Mifune was in control and confident in his skill in judo and had nothing to prove to anyone. While this book is focused on traditional karate-do, Mifune Kyuzo's story re-enforces the budo(武道) aspect of all the traditional martial arts.

Karate-do is an art that builds self-confidence to the point where it bolsters courage into the practitioner. Sometimes such bravado could lead the karate-ka astray to believe that when provoked by a challenge or taunting, courage means the willingness to fight. Backing down from a challenge or a simple name-calling is viewed as a cowardice action. But in terms of exercising control over one's own emotions and actions, the act of walking away requires more courage than engaging in the conflict. The animal instinct that resides within the human being is easily provoked into fighting. What differentiates humans from animals is the ability for the former to control one's emotions and

course of action. And unlike an animal, without exercising restraint, humans have far more lethal weapons than the body.

Cultivation of Mind and Body

“Martial arts is not a science that can be accomplished through fact finding. It needs to grow like a flower.” Anonymous

Karate-do training is based on a strong foundation, which must be developed over an extended period through the cultivation of the mind and body. Like a tree which must develop strong roots, the development of a strong foundation requires constant nurturing. For the karate-ka, the type of nurturing required to build such a strong foundation comes in the form of constant repetition of basic techniques that fortifies muscular and structural skill, while also integrating the mental and spiritual aspects of the art form. Thus, “cultivation” then becomes the incremental process by which the karate-ka progresses from the ground up such that, once the base has been established, other advanced techniques may be incorporated.

Too often the basics are abandoned early on during development, due to either boredom and/or impatience on the part of the student. There is no excitement in pouring concrete to establish a solid foundation for a house. The exciting part is in the design and implementation of the kitchen, bedroom, or entertainment room. For the beginning karate-ka, the excitement in learning the art is in the opportunity to apply techniques, either when sparring or learning a new kata. Modern karate-ka become bored performing the same kata after one or two years of practice. Some will claim to have learned all 26 Shotokan kata before reaching nidan, second degree black belt. While the passion for learning new kata is commendable, practicing a multitude of kata becomes nothing more than mimicking movements if there is no understanding of the basic techniques within one kata. Funakoshi makes note of the importance of mastering each technique from one kata in his book, “Karate-do: My Way of Life.”

“Once you have completely mastered one technique, you will realize its close relation to other techniques. You will, in other words, come to understand that all of the more than twenty kata may be distilled into only a few basic ones.”

To emphasize the importance of practicing one kata for an extended period, Funakoshi relates the story about the famous Japanese ballad-drama reciter, Master Koshiji. As a youngster, Koshiji learned from one

of the best instructors who was relentless in demanding he only practice one passage without ever being permitted to go any further. Day after day, month after month, and year after year, Koshiji recited the same passage. After a few years, Koshiji decided he was not suited for the profession and left the instructor. When he came upon a recitation contest at the inn in Shizuoka, Koshiji decided to enter knowing only one passage – he had nothing to lose. After the recitation, the sponsor of the contest cried out in admiration, “That was superb. You must be a master.” Koshiji denied the title and told his story of how he had left the instructor. The sponsor then told Koshiji he must return to the instructor and apologize. Koshiji became a master in his own right.

Sincere practitioners of the art continually refine the basics as they progress to higher levels. Fundamentals do not change, and the importance of training the basics is apparent even in the sports world. Football players learn the basics of blocking, tackling, and throwing at an early age, are reminded of the same rudimentary techniques as they progress from high school to college, and even to the professional level. The same holds true with basketball fundamentals of shooting, passing, and dribbling, as with volleyball players continue to practice setting, blocking, etc. As great a player as Kobe Bryant was in basketball, he was the first and last person in the gym practicing his fundamentals, such as free-throws and jump shots. Becoming adept at the basics, through diligent practice, defines mastery in all art form.

Cultivation starts from the ground up, as the analogy of planting a tree. A Properly developed tree has strong roots that is nurtured by adding manure and water. The karate-ka’s strong roots are based on the development of strong stances, which requires hours, days, and years of training, and sweat becomes the manure for the karate-ka. As the root becomes stronger the tree grows more vibrant. But the focus should not be on strengthening the upper branches of the tree and ignoring the roots. The majestic look can be deceiving in terms of strength. The giant Sequoias are one of the most massive trees on earth. But they are also the weakest since their roots are shallow. The bamboo, however, does not look as majestic as the Sequoia but grows a strong base and remains pliable at the top.

Physical training of the basics to keep the muscle memory sharp is realized even by amateur athletes. Unfortunately exercising the mental

basics is not so apparent to the majority. Technological advancement has enriched our lives with tools and gadgets such as calculators, cell phones, computers, GPS, etc. Calculators enable us to compute the most complex multiplication and division with ease, but if it becomes a dependent tool for calculating even the most basic math such as, 100×10 , then the brain is not being exercised. Computers have eased the pain of writing with instant spell checks and grammar checks, but the basics of knowing how to spell is essential when one has to pen the information on paper. With the reliance on GPS, the average person has no need for knowledge of compass direction or how to read a map. These technological devices are there to assist and make our lives easier, but the dependence on such devices even for the simplest function, takes away our utilization of the mental basics. The lowest common denominator for a human being is the utilization of the brain for cognizant thinking. Once this basic function is exercised less and less, the human can become a slave to technological tools. It is a social commentary on how technology has enhanced our life, at the same time diminished the use of our basic faculty.

Technology has also provided a multitude of methods to communicate than ever before, and yet the basics of communicating is still lacking. Regardless of what technological device is used for communicating, at the end it is about effective communication. Companies are equipped with land line phones, instant messaging on the computer, emails, video conferencing, and yet the biggest shortcoming in most companies is communication between staff and department.

There are of course, many positives to be gained from these technological advancements, which should be embraced. They have provided in many areas, better comfort, safer environment, simplicity of lifestyle, among other things to improve efficiency in people's lives. What used to take several days via standard mail to pay bills can now be accomplished within a matter of seconds through the internet. Packages can be delivered across the world within a matter of days. Information can be obtained within a matter of seconds through the internet. People can move about faster from place to place.

With such advancement also comes the faster paced lifestyle. Even as technology advances at a geometric rate, it will not satisfy the human

desire for faster results. Living in a fast-paced environment at home, at work, in school, tends to lead to impatience. But the lack of patience is not necessarily a by-product of an accelerated lifestyle as much as the human behavior and personality. The lack of patience results in seeking an easier alternative to achieve a goal. As an example, the annual New Year's resolution to exercise more and reduce weight starts off gallantly. Once reality sets in that to achieve the desired result requires diligent effort, commitment, and patience, an alternative approach is sought, such as liposuction, fad diets, tummy tucks, etc. Hence, in the United States consumers spend over one billion dollars each year in home exercise equipment, which rarely gets utilized, and fad diet plans that fail.

Instant gratification is permeated throughout most endeavors in the modern era. While there are some instant gratification endeavors that are meant to encourage positive results to build a person's confidence, the negative types produce laziness and sometimes leads to a sense of entitlement. In terms of physical conditioning, there is no substitute for hard work and time or patience.

While karate-do training may not alleviate student's desire for quick results, proper development is a reminder to remain patient. Learning an art to cultivate both the mind and body inculcates the relevance of developing the basics as the foundation for expanding one's knowledge and understanding. Such a process in learning an art form requires time and patience. And life's lessons cannot be acquired in a short time period – it has to be accumulated over the course of time.

“I have three things to teach you: simplicity, patience, compassion. These three are your greatest treasures.” Lao Tzu

“Patience is bitter, but its fruit is sweet.” Aristotle

Shu Ha Ri (守破離)

Shu Ha Ri (守破離) is a concept used in many Japanese arts, including martial arts, to describe the progression of the student's training from beginner to master. This ideology is said to have started with Chado (茶道), tea ceremony and adopted by Noh, classical Japanese play acting. Shu Ha Ri (守破離) is a descriptive term used to compartmentalize the student's learning stages; Shu(守), the protective stage, Ha(破), the study, research, and dissecting stage, and Ri(離), to derive at a new discovery or transcend.

Shu(守) the protective stage is one that is easy to grasp, since this is the phase where the student follows the instructor's teaching without question. Whether the student is tall, short, obese, the techniques and forms must be performed exactly as the sensei has outlined. The student must also remain faithful to the sensei and train in earnest to fully comprehend. The Shu (守) stage is not a matter of simply learning the basics as the time spent in this phase can amount to several years. It is the protective stage of abiding by the concepts the sensei has brought forth.

Ha(破) is the stage where many spend their time in the art. This is the stage of taking what the sensei has taught and dissecting it to further understand the concept. For the most part, the advanced student spends majority of time in this experimental phase of learning. However, the "Ha(破)" stage is sometimes misunderstood to mean the advanced student no longer needs directions from the sensei. On the contrary, the advanced student constantly returns to the "Shu (守)" stage with devotion to the sensei to once again learn what is being taught. From there the advanced karate-ka dissects what has been protected to fully understand the concept being taught in the "Ha(破)" phase.

Ri (離) is said to be the creative stage, where the student becomes the master and begins to formulate their own concepts. Very few karate-ka can reach or even realize this stage. But due to the impertinence of impatience and/or arrogance, some karate-ka will claim to have reached the "Ri(離)" stage after training for so and so number of years. Although the number of years has nothing to do with one's

understanding, Ri (離) is not about surpassing your sensei or developing a new style or formulating a new concept. The Ri stage is more about self-expression based on understanding the foundation and discarding what is not essential. In the process the adaptation of the principles to one's own body is to realize the art that has been transformed with a unique identity. The art evolves as the artist begins to understand and incorporates the principles towards self-expression.

The standard process of learning goes through the beginner, intermediate, to advanced phase. In effect this is how Shu Ha Ri (守破離) is sometimes viewed. But unlike the standard process of learning, Shu Ha Ri (守破離) is not simply a progression by accumulating skillset to advance to the next phase. In the usual process a beginner follows the exact instructions and movements from the instructor. Once the student becomes proficient with the rudimentary skills, they proceed to the intermediate level then eventually become advanced. This is the standard methodology for learning.

Where Shu Ha Ri (守破離) differs from standard learning methodology is students may become comfortable or unable to move themselves from the Shu (守) stage. Shu(守) being regarded as the beginner or protected stage, the common thought is once the student has diligently followed the exact movements and principles of the instructor, the student is ready to move on to the Ha(破) stage. The reliance on the sensei to constantly feed the student principles puts the student in a comfort zone not having to think about how to dissect the information being received. And in some instances, the student's inability to breakdown the concept keeps them in the Shu(守) stage. Further to the protective stage is the reluctance by the student to challenge the sensei's teachings. The reluctance can also be initiated by the sensei in not wanting to advance the student beyond the Shu(守) stage.

Karate-do training requires a sense of maturity which dictates the necessity for the students to oscillate between the Shu (守) and Ha(破) stages. Like a child wanting to run for the first time must learn the motor skills to crawl and walk first, the Shu(守) stage for the karate-ka is the phase of learning to develop the proper motor skills. Such skills may require the karate-ka to first develop the proper muscles or

mechanics of the movements at a very rudimentary level before being taught some of the nuances that should be practiced. For example, at the beginner level of training in karate-do, students are taught long and deep stances in order to develop strong legs and hips. At this juncture students are told stance stability is based on long and deep positions. As the karate-ka advances they are to realize that the long stances are for muscle development, and a stable stance is not purely based on just having strong legs and hips. With this understanding, the karate-ka begins to analyze the stance from a more natural perspective and re-trains the basics from the Shu(守) stage with the newly discovered shorter stances, without sacrificing stability. This requires the karate-ka to go from the Shu(守) stage to the Ha(破) stage for analysis, then back to Shu(守) to train the previous movements. Lack of understanding on the karate-ka's part, they will continue to train with long stances even at the advanced level.

“Before I studied the art, a punch to me was just like a punch, a kick just like a kick. After I learned the art, a punch was no longer a punch, a kick no longer a kick. Now that I’ve understood the art, a punch is just like a punch, a kick just like a kick. The height of cultivation is really nothing special. It is merely simplicity; the ability to express the utmost with the minimum.” Bruce Lee

This in essence is about understanding Shu Ha Ri(守破離) . When the student has truly understood the art, they have transcended in recognizing the Ri(離) stage as nothing more than coming back to what is natural with a deeper understanding of the art. Shu Ha Ri (守破離) is not about advancing from one stage to next and professing to have arrived at a new system or style. It is about the continual cycle of learning, studying, and adapting.



Balance of Nature

“Balance is perfect state of still water. Let that be our model. It remains quiet within and is not disturbed on the surface.” Confucius

At the turn of the century, a foreigner residing in Japan was interested in learning jujutsu (柔術) as he had heard it was a formidable martial art. He sought out a well-known sensei and began taking lessons.

After two weeks of lessons, he was not taught one single jujutsu (柔術) technique or any fighting moves. He was taught exercises and relaxed movements. At the end of the second week of practice he decided to boldly ask the sensei why he had not been taught any jujutsu (柔術) techniques.

The sensei graciously asked the foreign student to sit on the tatami and the sensei sat facing him. The student sat casually with his legs crossed and body slightly slumped over.

Sensei asked the student, “Are you seated well?”

“I don’t know. Is there a good way to sit?” the student responded.

His sensei simply pointed at how he was sitting, with his posture straight, and his head aligned with his body. The student felt frustrated and said, “But I didn’t come here to learn how to sit. When am I going to learn how to fight?”

“You want to learn how to fight? But how can you fight if you cannot find your balance?” asked the sensei.

Not understanding the question, the student responded, “I don’t see what sitting down has to do with fighting.”

“If you cannot keep your balance when you are seated, which is the most basic posture, how do you expect to keep your balance in other matters life will throw at you, especially in combat?”

With that the sensei leaned forward and pushed the seated foreigner slightly and he fell backwards. He then asked the student to try to push him over. At first, he tried lightly to push the sensei, then progressively applied more pressure. When he tried with all his force the sensei moved slightly and the student fell face down on the tatami.

“I hope you understand the importance of learning balance,” said the sensei.

The ability to maintain balance is not just about learning the techniques for leverage or being able to stand on one leg without falling. These physical attributes are certainly important to martial arts as well as for anyone in their daily life. But balance is also about the entire spectrum that affects us in life, as the sensei's statement in the previous tale – “how to keep your balance in other matters that life throws at you.” There is the physical balance, mental balance, and life balance.

From the physical standpoint karate-do kihon (basic) training emphasizes balance in terms of executing techniques from both sides of the body, equal number of repetitions from both arm and leg techniques. For obvious reasons, as an art of self-defense the capability must be there to be able to execute techniques from either the right or left side. The most obvious physical balance training in karate is being able to stand on one leg while executing kicks. But balance also exists in the stances, transition between movements, and training methodology. The most common technique, the reverse punch, is executed with the balance of the one side punching while the other arm is chambered at the hip. Interestingly such actions facilitate the balance of both the antagonist and protagonist muscles of the arm. In effect, the bicep and triceps muscles are engaged in contraction and relaxation. But these are rudimentary in regard to the overall training in karate-do.

Martial arts in general have the distinction of being classified as either a “hard” or “soft” style, “internal” or “external.” Hard and external being defined as displaying power from the external structure of the body, whereas soft and internal energy purportedly derives from the internal energy “chi” or “ki” in Japanese. Such distinctions have typecast certain forms of martial arts to be only one or the other, and not perceived as developing both elements. Tai Chi Chuan, (太極拳) as an example, is viewed as soft and internal, since the movements are performed slowly and internalized using “chi” energy rather than muscular strength. Aikido is also thought to be an internal and soft form where the movements flow seemingly without the use of one's own muscular strength. Karate on the other hand is usually classified as hard and external, where muscular strength is prominently demonstrated by the exponent of the art. But to view any martial arts as either one

extreme or the other is to be incongruent to the principles of balance within nature.

The Yin and Yang (陰陽) concept signifies the balance of two mutually complementary forces or elements in nature, night and day, male and female, soft and hard, good and bad, etc. This concept was adopted by martial artists in principle to defeat opponents in combat with the understanding of when to use strength and when to yield. But more importantly, it is about understanding the balance that exists within nature. Such balance must reside within the practice of all martial arts, not only to defeat an adversary but also to preserve one's own well-being. As humans one cannot escape the confines of the body, which consists primarily of muscles, skeletal structure, and water. To think that one can survive with only practicing "internal" energy alone weakens the structural integrity of our body. The practice of Tai Chi Chuan (太極拳) is seen as passively slow-motion exercise which requires very little effort. However, in executing the movements in slow motion requires a great deal of body control, which is dependent upon the sound structure of the body. Muscles are still being engaged, to make the body transition from one position to the next, but not in a tense manner. Likewise, the flowing movements in aikido demands the ability of the body to actively move in concert with the opponent. This requires structural balance as the feet pushes off the floor and changing the direction of the body. Without the use of an external source, the body cannot move simply by using "ki."

Karate-do on the other hand, is commonly viewed as "hard style" of martial art that displays brute force and nothing of suppleness. If karate is labeled as a "hard" style, it is because of the general misunderstanding and some of the karate-ka's inability to express the softer element of the art. There are styles of karate that emphasize teaching both internal and external. One style in particular, Goju-ryu, which literally translates as hard-soft style, integrates both elements. Without understanding and training the body to become more pliable, the karate-ka will continue to train by applying more brute force as they advance in rank. Often the demonstration of power prompts some karate-ka to lift weights to increase muscle mass. As important as muscle strength is to the body, without understanding the difference between weightlifting (power lifting for bulk) and weight training

(muscle toning), the muscle mass being developed could become non-functional muscles, which can limit mobility. Over time, this form of training tends to make the practitioner's body stiff and no longer malleable.

The most challenging thing for most karate-ka to do is to relax since muscle tension is thought to be the source for generating power. But the source of power is not dependent solely on muscle contraction, and the proper use of muscle tension and relaxation comes from understanding the flow of energy within the body. The state of relaxation and softness is sometimes misconstrued as lacking any framework or energy. On the contrary, the softness that karate-ka seeks to develop in training is similar to water – fluid yet powerful when the energy is properly channeled. Imagine a garden hose filled with water, and the amount of energy released is controlled by the nozzle. Thus, the achievement of balance in training is one of a strong frame that can move with grace and generate the necessary energy when required. The difficulty in understanding and practicing to be pliable is expressed in the following saying by the famous Chinese philosopher, Lao Tzu.

***Nothing in the world
Is as soft and yielding as water
Yet for dissolving the hard and inflexible,
Nothing can surpass it.***

***The soft overcomes the hard;
The gentle overcomes the rigid.
Everyone knows this is true,
But few can put it into practice.***

The longer one trains in karate-do the more supple one should become in movement and execution of the techniques. The flow of energy comes from within. Training to be fluid is also to prolong one's training. A young tree branch is strong and is difficult to break. It flexes as one attempts to bend or break it. But an old branch that no longer receives nourishment from the tree does not bend and breaks easily. As the body gets older it becomes stiff if continued energy is not provided from within. This is the essential for understanding to train

both 'go' hard, and 'ju' soft. The training of both is integrated into one, not separate.

Training to become balanced goes beyond recognizing hard and soft movements. The very nature of balance in the Yin and Yang (陰陽) concept is the coexistence of opposites, tension and relaxation, pressure and calmness. They are not mutually exclusive. Under pressure the natural response is to become tense. The counterbalance is relaxation and calmness. What defines success is the ability to accomplish something while under pressure. In sports, spectators are witness to such occurrences as the last second buzzer beater snatches victory away from the opposing team. The Los Angeles Lakers guard, Derek Fisher's infamous 3-point shot, on May 13, 2013, to win the playoff game with only 0.4 seconds remaining on the clock is a prime example of someone remaining composed under tremendous pressure long enough to make a difficult shot. It may be viewed as a lucky shot, which is often the case, but the ability to execute under pressure defines the moment.

In some cases, humans are more prone to succeed when pressure exists. Students in school find a way to complete term papers at the last minute when the pressure of the due date is near. Employees under compressed delivery schedule manage to find a way to complete the project just in time. Every year during tax season, people find ways to complete their tax returns by the deadline of April 15. Without the pressure of an upcoming exam, students will likely not study as hard. Call it procrastination or the ability to complete a task under pressure. But to continue producing results while under such strain can also lead to undue stress and may not produce the desired quality results. The balance that is sought is being able to accomplish the task at hand with minimal pressure.

“If you know the point of balance, you can settle the details. If you can settle the details, you can stop running around. Your mind will become calm. If your mind becomes calm, you can think in front of a tiger. If you can think in front of a tiger, you will surely succeed.” Mencius

Martial arts practice is not the only means to relieve stress or anxiety. For the most part any form of exercise such as yoga, running, swimming, et. al. physically demanding activity can counterbalance the stressful environment. The one major factor that karate-do and other martial arts provides towards the training of balancing pressure with calmness is the engagement of sparring with a partner. The art of fighting challenges the human being to respond under aggression, which places tremendous pressure on the individual. Call it survival as the motivator. The purpose of training in kumite then becomes the ability to handle the pressure and respond accordingly. Many view it as learning how to defend against an opponent in preparation for self-defense. But it is a means to develop an understanding of emotional control when confronted by an adverse circumstance. The skills of blocking and countering is integral to the development of being able to face adversity with a calm demeanor. As the practitioner's confidence grows in their technical skill, so does the ability to remain serene under harsh condition. This in essence becomes the stage of "fighting after winning."

The balance of relieving stress is also to understand the body's functions both from external and internal perspective. External muscular and structural development must be complemented with internal conditioning and utilization of the core. Martial artists have understood the use of the core connection in training for centuries. Reference of the tanden (丹田) (source of ki energy) is emphasized by all traditional martial art systems. Even modern exercise methodology has become more in tune with developing the core to strengthen the condition of the entire body. This understanding goes beyond the external physical appearance of a six pack. But the balance towards stress relieve also entails breathing exercises essential to any form of exercises. Deep breathing exercises is ingrained into yoga practice, as much as it is in karate-do. Breathing is so vital to karate-do that some styles place emphasis on learning to breath for at least two years as a beginner. Breathing then becomes integrated with each movement. The importance of understanding to breath deep and slow is essential especially when relieving a person experiencing anxiety.

Without the balance of a healthy mind and body, the individual can suffer ill health mentally and/or physically. Scientific research has

proven that students study better when regular exercise becomes part of their regiment, as opposed to solely focusing on the academics. Even for those who do not have to study, exercising relieves stress and tension from the daily challenges. But the balance of exercise also must be complemented with proper nutrition to fuel the body. Chemical imbalance from lack of proper enzymes and minerals from food can adversely affect the mental condition of individuals. The desire for instant weight loss has prompted many to try various diet plans. Many are controversial and typically promote extremes in terms of intake and may lack the proper balance of protein, fat, carbohydrates, and fiber.

The average person spends more time at work than they do at home. Weekends and vacation time provide some sense of relief, but balance is needed in the work environment as well. On the average, employees spend about 8 hours at work, with one hour for lunch, another hour to prepare for work, and if no traffic another hour to commute. Out of the 24 hours in a day, 11 to 12 hours are spent at or preparing to go to work. Minus the minimal sleep time of 7 hours, only 5 to 6 hours are left on a regular workday for the average person to relax and do other extra-curricular activities. Therefore, the importance of balancing work time to home or family becomes a major factor for the mental and physical health of the individual. Sometimes critical projects and deadlines demand more work hours, which then makes the ratio of work time to relaxation time even less. Lack of balance increases the level of stress for the individual.

Japanese employees are known for being dedicated to their company and have a reputation for working long hours. Sometimes this is to the detriment of the employee. The number of incidents and severity of overworked employees has soared each year such that a term is used to describe the symptom – “karoshi (過労死) i.” Karoshi(過労死) , literally translated means, “excessive work to death.” The term was first used sometime in the late 1970s. Employees work themselves to the point of starvation, heart attack, or stroke. Another serious consequence is the case of “karo-jisatsu(過労自殺) ,” meaning overworked suicide, which is when the employee commits suicide as a result of being overworked. The lack of a balanced lifestyle can contribute to such cases.

Life's balance is also about understanding compromises within family, spousal relationships, and general disputes. Compromise is not simple about capitulating to the other's wishes. Capitulating for reasons other than to stop an argument or disagreement is only to invite resentment later. The smaller inner circle within the yin and yang (陰陽) is to symbolize a small piece of the opposite side. True compromise is to attempt to understand the position of the other side, which may or may not be to your agreement, but at least you put yourself in the other person's position in an attempt to understand. In this way, the compromise becomes one of balanced understanding.

The human body is a complex machine that requires maintenance and fine tuning. The process of fine tuning the body is to keep it in balance, physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. The practice of karate-do is to maintain such a balance through understanding the principles of Yin and Yang (陰陽). Karate-do practitioners who dismiss this concept and recognize it only as a Chinese martial arts concept, fail to understand the correlation between the "do" art and the Tao. The Yin and Yang (陰陽) concept is part of the Tao, which is "do" in Japanese. Yin and Yang (陰陽) is In and Yo, respectively in Japanese, which is symbolized in many of the Okinawan and Japanese karate-do styles with red circles interlaced. To practice karate-do is to practice the Tao concept of Yin and Yang (陰陽). In seeking the path towards perfection of character, there must be balance in training and in life.

Self-Preservation

"The peculiar culture of the Okinawans, a peace-loving people desirous of living without weapons, made them raise the instinct of self-preservation to its highest form – the art of karate-do."

Nagamine Shoshin

On November 12, 1993, the first Ultimate Fighting Championships (UFC) was held in Denver, Colorado. The stage was set for the first hand-to-hand combat, with no weight class, no rounds, and no judges.

Only three rules were enforced: no eye gouging, no biting, and no groin attacks. Martial artists from all disciplines were invited to prove whether their art was effective in an actual fight. Participants included disciplines from Savate (French kickboxing), Sumo, Kickboxing, Boxing, Shoot Fighting (similar form of mixed martial arts), Tae Kwon Do, American Kenpo, and Brazilian Jujutsu. In the end, Royce Gracie, from Gracie Jujutsu, originating from Brazil, aka Brazilian Jujutsu, won by grappling and submission techniques.

The result of the first UFC challenge catapulted Brazilian Jujutsu to the limelight as “the” martial art that is most effective in actual street fight. The reaction from the martial arts world was reminiscent of the scene from Bruce Lee’s movie, “Return of the Dragon,” in which all the waiters decided to disrobe their do-gi(道着) and denounced practicing karate after witnessing Lee’s prowess in Chinese boxing. Martial artists and non-martial artists flocked to enroll in Brazilian jujutsu as the new form of self-defense. Karate and all other forms of martial arts were deemed not as effective in real self-defense or street fight since majority of the encounters end up on the ground.

Gracie Jujutsu’s sudden popularity only validates the human desire for self-preservation and, in particular - self-defense. It also reinforced the human desire to gravitate towards “so-called” effective techniques for self-defense. This trend has repeated itself numerous times throughout the history of pugilist arts. Within the 20th century, judo and jujutsu (柔術) was favored after World War II as an effective way of defeating larger size assailants. When karate was introduced in the 1960s, judo and jujutsu (柔術) became less popular. Karate was overshadowed by kung fu (功夫) with the Bruce Lee craze in the early 1970s, when the populace found out Lee had studied Wing Chun kung fu. Kung fu (功夫) took a backseat when Aikido became known as the effortless art of self-defense, made popular largely in part to movies by Steven Segal. Later, Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) came into the picture and combined all the martial arts, including Muay Thai kickboxing and Western boxing. Brazilian Jujutsu solidified their position as the latest craze after the UFC challenge. As the trend continues, no doubt sometime in the future another form of pugilist art will surpass Brazilian Jujutsu as “the” method for self-defense.

The insatiable quest for the “so-called” best martial arts for self-defense is in pursuit of the techniques, the elixir, the quick fix, and easiest method of learning self-defense. All the martial arts provide the student the necessary skills to defend. The best martial arts for self-defense is a relative term. The ancient game of rock, paper, scissors, demonstrates that no one item is the victor all the time. The rock defeats the scissor by crushing, the scissor defeats paper by cutting, and the paper defeats the rock by wrapping. Depending on the circumstance, a simple ashi-waza (foot throwing technique), an elbow strike, a palm strike to the chin, a heel stomp to the instep, or simply running away is sufficient in self-defense. To compare which art is the best is mainly to entertain the human fascination with fighting arts, not about self-defense.

Mankind’s fascination with combat arts for entertainment has existed since the days of the Roman gladiators and certainly before that time. Every culture has their own version of the gladiator matches that have intrigued the fighting spirit of mankind. The innate animal instinct that has always existed within humans drives them to prove their ability to fight and protect. The attraction of spectators also exists as entertainment and validation of superiority. UFC and MMA matches have become the modern-day version of the gladiators in the arena. The no-holds-barred matches in UFC also vindicated the brutality of combat form of fighting. There is no doubt Brazilian Jujutsu and MMA are effective methods in a real street fight but there is a difference between self-defense for self-preservation versus self-defense for combat. There is also a difference between fighting for entertainment value and fighting for survival.

Hand-to-hand combat methods, such as judo and jujutsu (柔術) were taught to millions of soldiers during World War I and World War II. Within 8 to 10 weeks of basic training, soldiers were taught how to disarm, maim, and kill the enemy with their bare hands as well as with their weapons. It became the unarmed self-defense method for combat. The ultimate test of their skill was in actual combat against an enemy that was destined to kill or be killed. The effectiveness did not need to be validated by possession of a black belt or any other ranking system. In mortal combat, self-defense meant destruction of the enemy before they destroy you.

Self-defense for self-preservation is about construction not destruction. It takes nine months to construct a human being. It takes years to construct an adult human being from infancy to adolescence to maturity. It only takes a few seconds to destroy a human being. Trees take decades to grow to their majestic size. In a matter of a few minutes they can be cut down.

Any form of martial arts constructs the human body into something formidable in terms of health, strength of mind, body and character. The construction phase requires dedication, patience, and commitment on the part of the student. The process of learning also goes through the beginner or childhood phase, intermediate or adolescence phase, then advanced or maturity level.

The eagerness to learn martial arts does not always equate to the amount of dedication on the part of the student. Those wanting to learn any form of martial arts mainly for self-defense are usually not the ones that will remain in the dojo for long. The desire to learn self-defense whether as preventative means of protection, or after encountering some unfortunate incident is like attempting to learn a foreign language a month or so before departing for the country. Rudimentary phrases are memorized enough to get by for shopping or ordering at restaurants - just as certain self-defense scenarios, such as breaking out of a bear hug or one arm grab, are practiced demonstrating the effectiveness of the techniques. But when it comes to actual conversation with a native speaker, without fluency, it is impossible to anticipate all the possible phrases and scenarios. Similarly no self-defense situation is pre-determined. Colloquial terms and verbiage are not the same as textbook phrases. Textbook greetings are usually proper, such as in English, "How are you?" is the formal phrasing. Colloquial greetings among casual acquaintances can be as simple as, "What's up?" or "Hey, what's shaking?" which when translated literally has a totally different meaning. As with learning self-defense techniques in a dojo, any form of pre-arranged attack is like a formal response in learning a new language. In a real encounter the attacks are not predictable, and neither are greetings always the standard, "How are you?". The pre-arranged responses enable the student to understand and adapt after becoming more adept. But even if some fluency is acquired, the depth of understanding a foreign language involves understanding the culture

of the country as well as the idioms. Traditional karate punches are anticipated to be straight. The idiom of a standard punch is usually not straight. But as with wanting to learn karate simply for self-defense, casual studying of a foreign language usually does not last long.

When constructing the body, mind, and character of the karate-ka, physical training is arduous. Those who have the willingness continue to forge through the toughest workouts the sensei can muster. But in doing so sometimes the karate-ka forgets that self-preservation is also about learning to execute with refinement and polishing of the techniques with efficiency. At the childhood phase the student's attempt at learning a new skill is about applying all their might, or brute force method. The simple act of learning to dribble a ball may take two hands at first, then eventually using one hand with more force to initiate the bounce. Eventually at the more advanced phase, the student is able to apply less pressure on the ball and move freely while dribbling with ease. Karate-ka who have trained through the intermediate and advanced phase do not always comprehend the concept of self-preservation in training. The skills they have acquired continue to be executed as if they were still in the childhood phase. The main difference – the advanced level pounds the ball with more force than the beginner. For the beginner, the common act of executing gyaku-zuki (reverse punch) is applying mostly upper body muscles with little hip action. At the advance phase, the karate-ka should execute the punch with smooth transition of the hips and arms with the power generating from the floor. Those who fail to understand the concept of self-preservation in training will generate more power from the hips and muscles. The outcome may result in injuries to the shoulder joint, elbow joint, hip joint, knees, or back. Training harder instead of learning how to train smarter.

The forging of the samurai sword is to heat and pound the raw steel over and over until the steel has been strengthened. At some point the sword needs to be sharpened and polished. Continuing to pound the sword at the advanced stage is to weaken its unrefined edges. Even a dull blade needs to be sharpened and polished from time to time.

In centuries of feudal battles, both armed and unarmed combat have given way to finding an understanding of the value of training in the

martial arts. Skill in combat becomes more about self-preservation of health, from a physical, mental, and spiritual standpoint. Part of self-preservation is being vigilant against any potential threat. Neutralizing the danger comes through the constant training in budo (武道) in preparation for conflict not necessarily to engage in the combat, but to avoid and prevent conflict.

The idea of being vigilant is something everyone practices from time to time. It may be based on special occasions or something that is done on a daily basis. Driving to work, awareness is there for surrounding cars, traffic signal, and pedestrians. On the subway or bus, the majority of people are attentive to their surrounding neighbors sitting or standing beside them. When planning on a family vacation, one becomes vigilant about how to secure money or credit card and passport from getting lost or stolen. In preparation for the vacation environment warm or light clothes are packed along with the necessity of specific toiletries and battery chargers for phones and laptops. In these cases, no one wants to lose their wallet, purse, or phone chargers. To ensure their safety as well as the safety of others, awareness is there.

Part of the training in karate-do and other budo (武道) arts is becoming aware and maintaining vigilance. The main purpose of martial arts is self-protection, which does not necessarily have to come in the form of physical attack or resort to physical confrontation. The goal of self-defense is to be aware and avoid danger before it occurs. The following hyperbolized tale of Bokuden Tsukahara, the legendary swordsman's selection of his successor illustrates the superiority of the warrior with awareness over the ones that have simply mastered the skills.

Bokuden, who had advanced in age needed to select his successor as head of his school among his three sons. He invited his friend to witness the selection process, which was to be a test. Bokuden asked his friend to stand behind the door with a bokken (wooden sword) and to be prepared to strike the person that enters the room. None of his sons were aware of the test and were kept separate in their respective rooms.

Bokuden sat inside his room and summoned the first swordsman, his youngest son. The youngest eagerly opened the door and as he entered

the room, Bokuden's friend came down with the bokken. The youngest shifted his body to avoid the wooden sword and quickly drew his own sword ready to strike back. When he realized it was a test, Bokuden's son turned and bowed to his father. With that Bokuden dismissed his youngest son.

After witnessing what was certain to be the chosen successor, Bokuden's friends remarked with amazement at the youngest son's speed and reaction time. "He must be the one to succeed – his reaction time and skill with the sword were amazing!" Bokuden responded, "No."

The middle son was summoned next. As soon as he opened the door, again the bokken came down swiftly. But this time, before the bokken could come down, the middle son had already drawn his sword and blocked it. Realizing it was a test the son turned and bowed to the father.

Impressed with the impeccable timing, Bokuden's friend remarked, "Surely he must be the one – I have never seen anyone with such timing and speed!" Bokuden again responded, "No."

Lastly his oldest son was summoned. Bokuden's friend stood near the door ready with the bokken raised high over his head. Bokuden asked his son to enter. The eldest son opened the door, but before he entered, he placed his hand on the hilt of the sword. In a calm voice the eldest son said, "Whoever is standing behind the door, unless you want to die by my sword, place your weapon on the floor."

Bokuden turned to his friend and said, "This is my successor."

This tale was so well-known that similar selection process was portrayed on-screen in "The Seven Samurai" and "The Magnificent Seven."

The ability to sense danger or the keen sense of awareness may seem only probable for hyperbolized legendary figures. But a story of Funakoshi Gichin's sense of awareness, as recalled by his own students, astonished them. When karate-do became popular in Japan, Funakoshi Sensei was asked to perform demonstrations at various parts of the country. Accompanying him were some of his senior students. Funakoshi had asked them to attack him anytime they felt as if his guard was down, as a way for him to always train to be on guard. Of course, the students were reluctant to attack their sensei, especially an

octogenarian. But as Funakoshi insisted, the students finally decided to end the foolishness and decided the best time was when Sensei was asleep. This way sensei will realize that no one can be alert while they were asleep. The opportunity presented itself after a long day of demonstration, Funakoshi Sensei had retired to his room. Takagi, being the sempai was elected to attack him. Takagi quietly approached Funakoshi Sensei's room and paused next to him and contemplated, 'What a foolish thing to do while he's so vulnerable – instead of attacking I'll simply wake him and show him how foolish his request was.' While Takagi hesitated to attack, Funakoshi still lying on the tatami spoke, "Takagi, if you are going to attack, please do so soon. I'm an old man and in need of my sleep." A stunned Takagi bowed deeply to Funakoshi Sensei and left the room.

The only sure victory in any fight is avoidance. There is no guarantee skill alone can win in a fight. Self-defense is not always a matter of one-on-one encounters. Thugs, like gangs are more confident in groups. And unlike a fight, self-defense is usually by surprise at the victim's weakest moment – never announced.

Self-preservation then becomes one of building a strong body, mind, and spirit. The study of self-defense itself is for the preservation of life. Preservation through protecting oneself, loved ones, friends, or those who are vulnerable.

A rose grows thorns to protect its beauty, not to seek out danger.

空手道

Preservation of Karate-do

“There is only one good – knowledge; and one evil – ignorance.”

Socrates

Millions practice karate-do around the world today, but the incipient attraction of self-defense is not what has popularized the art. The prevailing trend for the majority of the practitioners is toward competition, which has fueled all age groups to participate from youth to the senior class. While the competitive environment has many positives to be gained for the participants, karate-do as an art must be prudent not to fall victim to the same fate as judo - a once proud martial art of Japan that has been relegated to being primarily viewed as sports and has lost much of its appeal as an art of budo (武道). Certainly, the competitive aspect of any sport is more appealing than pure art, based on the allure of winning, athletes being lionized for their achievements, or simply being able to compete on the big stage. But these are instant gratifications that are short lived and often easily forgotten. What differentiates karate-do as an art versus sport, from a rudimentary perspective is, the latter is based on training for the competition arena as the final challenge, with the former as lessons learned in preparation for life. Training for sports has an end as the body ages. Karate-do as an art views competition as simply another method of training in preparation for life as the final challenge. Karate-do training ends at the final chapter of life. If karate-do continues to promote competition without understanding this concept, it will succumb to also losing its budo (武道) ideals. The preservation of karate-do is dependent upon educating the students about philosophical principles that are defined through the practice of the art with competition as being one facet.

The word preservation, by definition, infers keeping something in its original state and protected. But in the context of preserving karate-do as an art, it does not imply keeping the techniques and training methods the same as the masters of the past have passed on to the next generation as some karate instructors would believe. Techniques and method of training have evolved since the days of karate's first introduction into Japan. The extent of the change is extensive enough it merits a book of its own. Suffice it to say the technical changes are

noticeable to the point where students from the same system such as Shotokan, will have different views about how certain stances or techniques should be executed. Technical executions will continue to evolve, especially as the popularity of competition continues to grow. Whether it evolves in the proper direction for the betterment of the art or for sports competition remains to be seen.

What remains constant are the principles behind the art, which are important to understand and preserve. The philosophical principles of Tao, Yin and Yang (陰陽), and ideals of Zen have not changed. They are based on the ways of nature. Karate-do, like all budo (武道) arts is based on the study of nature. The ancestral creation of Chinese martial arts, considered to be the fore father to karate, imitated the movements of animals such as, the tiger, crane, snake, monkey, and dragon to derive at the most effective and efficient way of self-protection. Coupled with the guiding principles of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taosim, that influence the moral principles that guide the human behavior, martial arts transcended the simplistic approach of self-defense.

Any martial art with any level of depth has philosophical principles as the basis of its foundation. What shapes the character of the individual is the philosophical principles coupled with physical training. Gone are the days of the samurai and feudal battles, yet the fighting spirit and the ideals of these warriors are still lauded by karate-ka and martial arts enthusiast of today. By doing so, modern martial artists have preserved the image, culture, and philosophy of the samurai to the extent that the traditions are worthy of being studied and emulated. Preservation of such noble warrior's traits stem from many positive attributes that future generation of martial artists continue to admire. Even if the tales of the feats are often romanticized or apocryphal, the image of a samurai is one of reverence and disciplined martial artists.

Musashi Miyamoto, considered by many to be the best swordsman during the era of the samurai, tested his skills against over 60 worthy opponents without a single defeat. His adeptness with the sword is undisputed. But it was not until Musashi wrote his philosophical principles about the strategies in the infamous writing of, "Go Rin no Sho" that Musashi discovered the depth of the art, relating to the "Do"

and Confucianism. Go Rin no Sho, meaning the Book of Five Rings, refers to the strategies related with the five elements: earth, water, fire, wind, and void. Ironically, such strategies for combat is being studied by businessmen in the modern era for management strategies and how to win in the corporate world. Musashi is remembered not only for his swordsmanship, but also for his philosophy.

A more contemporary martial artist, Bruce Lee, is prominently known for displaying his skills on the movie screen. His ability to defeat opponents in real life was not one of fiction, but based on his reputation as a fighter, who would test his skill not in competition but in actual fights as a troubled youth. Later his physical skills were complemented by his study of the philosophical principles of the Tao which elevated his understanding of the martial arts to a greater depth. Bruce Lee's philosophical principles are now transcribed into many books that are more about application of martial arts to daily life. What has been preserved is the legend of Bruce Lee as a great martial artist and philosopher.

Both legends are not your typical traditionalist and yet their character was shaped by the art and the philosophical principles. Neither were guided by a sensei or master throughout their pursuit for greatness. Their passion for the respective arts brought them the knowledge of wisdom through mental and physical training. Musashi is associated with greatest with the sword and knowledge of Go Rin No Sho. Bruce Lee is known for his physical skills in kung fu (功夫), which he later philosophized into the Tao of Jeet Kune Do, named after the art that he founded.

Preservation is not only to protect something of value, but also to impart onto others the knowledge about what is worth preserving. The transfer of knowledge about the technical and philosophical principles of karate-do lies in the hands of the sensei. Sensei is the common title used to describe an instructor. Literal translation of sensei means, "born ahead." The title is given not only to karate-do instructors but also to anyone who teaches, as in schoolteachers and other form of educators. The inference of "born ahead" is someone who has studied the subject matter long before the students and has the ability to teach, not necessarily reflective of age. But the role of a karate-do sensei is more

than just being able to teach, and perhaps fittingly so with educators – they should guide the student. As such, a lesser known classical title that appropriately describes a karate-do instructor is, *shi-nan* (指南) . Literally translated *shi-nan* (指南) means, “finger south,” implying a compass that directs the student towards the proper direction. A true karate-do sensei is one that guides the student towards understanding not only the physical concept behind the movements but also the moral compass and the principles of the art. Regardless of title, the instructor takes on the responsibility to guide the students towards the proper direction for learning the art.

Karate-ka’s display of technical prowess is axiomatic to any casual observer. Even students of karate will tend to gravitate towards instructors or karate athletes with kinesthetic intelligence (keen sense of body awareness) that can demonstrate techniques with awe inspiring moves. However, technical proficiency alone does not make the karate-ka a sensei or define his or her true character. A person with high IQ (intelligence quotient) does not always translate to success or becoming a good teacher. They must also possess emotional intelligence and practical intelligence. Emotional intelligence is the awareness and management of one’s inner experience, and practical intelligence is the ability to cope with the challenges and opportunities in life, in essence, common sense. Kinesthetic intelligence, as with IQ is built into the DNA of the person at birth. Emotional and practical intelligence is something a person learns with experiences in life. The shaping of the karate-ka’s character is to experience the art through life, and not necessarily predicated on the person’s IQ or kinesthetic intelligence. Such experiences are not purely about mastering physical skills but developing the emotional quotient and the practical quotient through the austere physical and mental training. Chinese use the phrase, “chr ku (吃苦) ,” meaning “eat bitter” referring to someone that has endured hardship. The Asian culture views a person that has “eaten bitter” to be a person of virtue. It is in the behavior of the karate-ka that sets apart his or her true understanding of demonstrating the budo (武道) principles.

The purpose of studying philosophy is to make the individual think profoundly about their action. If karate-do is to be preserved for future generations, it is incumbent upon karate-ka’s, both student and

instructors, to understand the importance of embracing the philosophical aspect of the art in their training. Even more important is applying these principles in life. Funakoshi's precept, ***"Put karate into your everyday living,"*** is not based solely on self-defense awareness. It is also about learning to coexist with one another through respect, compromise, integrity, and compassion.

"To study without thinking is worthless; to think without study is dangerous." Confucius

In the million or so years of human existence mankind has evolved from a barbaric state to a civilized environment. Throughout time, change is the only constant as human beings become smarter with the accumulation of knowledge through experience and making amendments to existing laws, adjusting to the changing times, improve living conditions with the advent of technology, and continually seeking ways towards an efficient society. But the one constant that will never change – human interaction with other humans. As the social climate narrows, people interact with a multitude of diverse ethnicities, communities, and genders. As a civilized society the need for tolerance among the populace becomes greater as we interact with diversity. It is in this climate of indifference that mankind's prejudice of others rears its ugly head. And the prejudice is not limited to the conflict between blacks versus whites. Whites have expressed bigotry against other whites, such as the Irish, Italians, and Jews. Genocide in Rwanda in 1994 was the killing of blacks by another black tribe. Gangs fight against other gangs of the same ethnicity for territorial control. The fact that someone speaks, acts, looks, or smells different from the masses incites some form of intolerance. Humans, being the most intelligent species on the planet have also demonstrated the most egregious behavior towards their own kind. Intolerance leads to other human emotional behaviors, such as envy, fear, frustration, animosity, which sets off confrontation. A pacifist can envision a utopian society where all of mankind can coexist without any violence or war. However, such a scenario will not last if humans have differences and emotions. The only way human beings with differences have come together in a united front is when there is a common enemy or cause to be reckoned with.

Common interests also unite people, whether it is a hobby, profession, alma mater, or culture. A sense of belonging and pride bonds people with a common interest, even if they are strangers to one another. In this instance, ethnicity, race, gender, and color have no bearing. This leads to the establishment of clubs, societies, and organizations.

Practicing a “do ” art brings an understanding to the community of practitioners seeking the “way.” Irrespective of whether the “do ” art is a martial art or not, there is an appreciation by the “do ” practitioners of the commitment, loyalty, and determination required to excel in their respective art form. Such common understanding brings about societal coexistence and harmony.

Karate-do, as with other “do ” arts, is about experiencing the act of doing. As the famous Chinese proverb states -

**To hear is to forget
To see is to remember
To do is to understand**

It is difficult for someone to appreciate something if they have not experienced it. Most people in the Western culture can appreciate the speed of a football being thrown from an NFL (National Football League) quarterback or even a college level quarterback. The respect is also there for the speed with which a baseball player can throw a ball or tennis professional’s serve. This is primarily because most have experienced playing such sports either recreationally or in school. But when Westerners observe ping pong or badminton as a spectator for the first time, the initial reaction is likely they are a simple game. However, until a person stands in front of a veteran ping pong or badminton player, they will not realize that ping pong players can hit the ball at speeds of 60mph, and badminton shuttle cocks can strike at speeds exceeding 120mph. Similarly, the difficulty of Chado (茶道) or Shodo (書道) cannot be appreciated simply by observing.

Karate-do as an art, does not discriminate against age, race, religion, sex, social class, or any other indifferences. To subscribe to learning karate-do purely for techniques is to imply an obese individual, a young child, or a disabled person cannot meet the standards of a physically fit

person practicing karate-do. Karate-do is the “way” as determined by the individual’s quest to become better physically, mentally, and spiritually irrespective of their initial physical or mental state. The path to perfection is gauged by the incremental progress that each karate-ka makes each time they step on the dojo floor. In order to harness the mental and spiritual energy, the body must be pushed to the maximum. This then teaches the karate-ka strength of character and how to cope with the challenges in life.

Benefits of training in karate-do goes beyond the cliché of self-discipline, coordination, self-confidence, cultivation of mind and body. Physical benefits can be as subtle as improved posture, flexibility, balance, awareness, reaction time, coordination, agility, and fitness in general. The outcome in terms of practical application is being able to avoid danger with quicker reaction, or simply being able to maintain balance when encountering a slippery surface. Being a little more flexible allows one to be avoid injuries.

Mentally, karate-do training improves focus and concentration, calmness, discipline, and confidence. Psychological benefits are the result of mental health: ability to control emotions, reduce stress, tolerance, and sensitivity to others.

Spiritual benefits are peace of mind, willingness to overcome challenges, the will to survive, unrelenting effort, and strengthening self-esteem. One of the fundamentals of karate-do training is to emphasize the drive or the spirit, which is more important than the technique. As the famous quote from Mark Twain, ***“It’s not the size of the dog in a fight, it’s the size of the fight in the dog.”*** This spiritual tenacity also enables the individual to exceed far more than they could have imagined.

The essence of karate-do is about understanding the idea of dualism within the art. The understanding of the yin and yang (陰陽) concept is that opposing forces must coexist. To engage in kumite is to avoid a fight. The training is physically demanding and equally demanding in the use of mental concentration. The ancients conceivably designed intricate movements into the techniques and kata for the students to become mentally engaged in the execution. There is a level of simplicity in the techniques such that it can easily be applied in self-defense, yet there exists complexity in each movement within the

techniques. The art teaches self-defense techniques that can potentially cause great harm, and yet inculcate respect and compassion. It is an individual experience but there is also a strong social component associated with the camaraderie amongst karate-ka from all walks of life. It starts off developing a strong external action which needs to be complemented by internalization of the movements to give it maximum potential.

Okinawa, an island of peaceful people, gave birth to karate-do, which is observed by non-karate practitioners to be a violent art. Okinawans practice karate-do more for self-preservation as the “way” to improve health, both mental and physical, and less about combat. To appreciate peace is to understand the nature of violence. The existence of both is to understand the balance of nature. The hurricane can produce the most destructive storm and carries with it the center that is calm and unperturbed. To train in karate-do is to understand the nature of force and how the body can move in harmony with it. The practicality of self-defense is exercised only when all other options have been exhausted. As a peaceful society, exercising compassion is a way of life for Okinawans, as with training in karate-do.

Karate-do should be practiced as an art that fosters goodwill within the dojo community and outside the dojo. To preserve the true art of karate-do, it must return to its purest state, where rank did not define mastery, or competing to win status. Both the student and instructor must keep “kara” in mind, since even a master can learn from a beginner. A true sensei is humble and does not need to demand respect from others – it is already bestowed upon him or her. The desire for greater titles or different color belt beyond black, is to signify the need for recognition. This then adds to promotion of one’s ego, which is the opposite of humility. The constant seeking of technical proficiency is to one day become technique-less. Techniques will continue to evolve and change, but the principles will remain just as the moral values of human existence stays constant. The desire for promotion and title is to one day become “kara,” pure of heart. It is not about time measured achievements, but the obtainment of knowledge over time, through patience and understanding.

Training in karate-do begins and ends with a bow. Prior to and after training, students sit in stillness and quiet at the command of “mokuso(黙想) ,” meaning to meditate. Literal translation, quiet thought. A moment of self-reflection on the part of the karate-ka to “empty” their mind of what has transpired or will take place during the day, and be ready to receive the lesson at hand. Training involves giving earnest effort to the point of physical and mental exhaustion such that the spirit of the karate-ka rises to the challenge. When the session ends, the students return to “mokuso,” in preparation to face the world outside the dojo with an “empty” mind. Only through emptiness can one learn new things.

“The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing.”
Socrates

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About The Author

Sensei Albert Cheah is a graduate of Electrical Engineering from the University of Southern California. He has been training in karate-do since the early 1970s under the tutelage of Nishiyama Hidetaka Sensei. He has competed nationally and internationally for the United States karate team for 10 years. Sensei Cheah currently is an international judge and serves as

technical director and on the board of directors for the WTKF. Sensei Cheah has been teaching traditional karate-do in Orange County, California since 1980

About This Book

“Karate-do: the Art Beyond Techniques” offers a unique insight into the history, culture, and philosophy of martial arts, and in particular how karate-do training applies to daily life. In this modern era of karate-do training, students of the art are more engaged in perfecting their technical skills and forgetting the philosophical principles that seeks to perfect the character of the person. In this thought-provoking book, Sensei Albert Cheah engages newcomers to the art as well as advanced karate-do students to explore and understand the deeper meaning behind the art. Beyond the cliché of learning martial arts for fighting, self-defense, or competition, “Karate-do: the Art Beyond Techniques” takes the reader into understanding the etymology of budo , karate, and the significance of how training can be applied in daily routine.